THE ROLE OF RELATIONAL ETHICS AND FORGIVENESS IN
ADULT SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS

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THE ROLE OF RELATIONAL ETHICS AND FORGIVENESS IN
ADULT SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative research study investigated forgiveness in adult sibling relationships. The goal of this study was to investigate forgiveness in adult sibling relationships and the role of relational ethics and relational satisfaction. A thorough review of the literature on Contextual theory and forgiveness in the MFT field is presented. One hundred and seventy-eight participants were included in the study to address the hypotheses, which include: (1) higher levels of relational ethics in sibling relationships are positively and significantly correlated with higher levels of forgiveness; (2) relational satisfaction in sibling relationships is significantly and positively correlated with forgiveness in sibling relationships; (3) relational ethics in sibling relationships is significantly and positively correlated with relational satisfaction in adult sibling relationships; and (4) relational satisfaction mediates the relationship between relational ethics and sibling forgiveness, such that higher levels of relational ethics will in turn lead to higher levels of relational satisfaction, which would in turn lead to higher levels of forgiveness. A discussion of the findings, limitations of the study, research and clinical implications, and direction for further research are addressed after the conclusion of the study.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my three brothers, and for everyone who has experienced the ups and downs of sibling relationships.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The field of Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) has been evolving over the past 40 years (Nichols & Schwartz, 2012). Today the MFT field has many well-established theories (e.g., Structural Theory, Solution Focused Theory, Strategic Theory, etc.), but as the profession has matured, it has looked at research evidence for treatment models. In addition, other aspects of the MFT field have been investigated, such as family functioning and family relationships that focus on family systems (the primary social group, which typically includes parents and/or caregivers and children) and family subsystems (a smaller system within the larger family system, including couple dyads, parent-child dyads, or sibling) (Nichols & Schwartz, 2012). Research focusing on the whole family system includes a broad range of studies, such as Hackbarth, Pavkov, Wetchler, and Flannery (2011), Klever (2009), Lambert, Skinner, and Friedlander (2010), and Ungar (2015). Research across generations covers parent-child relationships (e.g., Byng-Hall, 1995; McWey, Pazdera, Vennum, Wojciak, 2012; Solomon, Ono, Timmer, & Goodlin-Jones, 2008; Timmer, Urquiza, Zebell, & McGrath, 2005; Van Parys & Rober, 2012); and family subsystems such as couple dyads have been researched by Gangamma, Bartle-Haring, Holowacz, Hartwell, and Glebova (2014), Greenberg, Warwar, and Malcolm (2010), Knudson-Martin, Huenergardt, Lafontant,
Bishop, Schaepper, and Wells (2015); Legaree, Turner, and Lollis (2007), to list just a few.

While much research has been conducted on couple subsystems, today little research has been done by MFTs investigating sibling subsystems. More specifically, there has been a lack of MFT research literature in the area of adult sibling relationships. A study conducted by this author investigated communicating forgiveness in adult sibling relationships through the attachment theory framework (Apel, 2009). This study investigated forgiveness communication message types. Specifically, this study aimed at identifying the relationship between four different communication forgiveness message types (identified by Kelley & Waldron, 2005) and attachment style; how one’s attitude toward forgiveness influences relational satisfaction in adult sibling relationships; the relationship between communication forgiveness message types and relational maintenance strategies; and the incidences in which siblings report seeking forgiveness (Apel, 2009). Results from this study indicate that individuals with a more secure attachment style used more explicit acknowledgement and direct forgiveness seeking tactics (Apel, 2009). Although the study was interesting and added to the existing literature, it was not conducted from an MFT perspective. Research on sibling relationships from an MFT perspective is needed in order to fill the gap that exists.

After conducting a thorough literature search (using search words such as sibling relationship, adult sibling relationship, marriage and family therapy, family therapy, and sibling forgiveness), Apel (2009) was the only study found that had focused on adult sibling relationships and forgiveness. Although the above study investigated forgiveness in sibling relationships, this study did not use a MFT theory for its study but instead
focused on attachment theory. This present study differed from the study conducted in 2009 by investigating adult sibling relationships through the lens of Contextual family theory (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1987). More specifically, this study investigated relational ethics in adult sibling relationships and forgiveness. Therefore, the following sections will review the topic of relational ethics, adult sibling relationships, and forgiveness. Lastly, conceptualizations for relational ethics and forgiveness will be presented, as well as the research questions and hypotheses this study examined.

**Conceptual Framework**

The following section will discuss the conceptual framework of Contextual Theory. This will include a presentation on relational ethics, which is considered the heart of the Contextual model.

**Relational Ethics**

Relational ethics, which is considered to be the cornerstone of Contextual family theory developed by Ivan Bozsermenyi-Nagy, is founded on the principles of systems theory, philosophy, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis (Bozsermenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986; Gangamma, 2008; Gangamma & Bartle-Haring, 2012). With an emphasis on fairness in relationships, relational ethics focuses on the objective balance of justice, trustworthiness, loyalty, entitlement, and between members of a relationship (Gangamma, 2008; Hargrave, Jennings, & Anderson, 1991). Boszormenyi-Nagy and Krasner (1986) reported that symptoms in relationships exist when there is an imbalance of fairness due to past trust violations, destructive entitlements, or invisible loyalties are present. The Contextual theory proposes both constructive and destructive entitlements that occur in all relationships (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986). Constructive
entitlements is based on the merit earned in relationships; whereas destructive entitlement is a result of victimizations which inclines individuals to partake in harmful and repetitive behaviors in relationships, often with individuals that did not victimize and are therefore innocent (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1987; Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986; Gangamma, 2008). Boszormenyi-Nagy, Grunebaum, and Ulrich (1991) suggested that the perception of imbalance in the “give and take” in relationships, which is reinforced by destructive entitlement, is a factor in family and marital dysfunction. For example, in couple and marital subsystems, the perception of fairness (or unfairness) in relationships is said to be a result of the experiences in the family of origin, which refers to the idea of intergenerational transmission of relational patterns (Gangamma, 2008).

Although the concepts of Contextual theory are widely used and endorsed, there is a lack of research using this model. The majority of the research on this topic is within romantic relationships (e.g., Adkins, 2010; Gangamma, 2008; Gangamma & Bartle-Haring, 2012; Grames, 2005; Grames, Miller, Robinson, Higgings, & Hinton 2008; Hargrave et al., 1991). After a thorough literature search, only one study was found that investigated the quality of sibling relationships during adolescence using the relational ethics scale (Chambliss, Caruso, & Stricker, 1992). To date the author, despite a thorough literature review, was unable to find any studies that investigated relational ethics and forgiveness in adult sibling relationships. In order to understand the importance of adult sibling relationships, the following section will discuss this topic more thoroughly.
**Adult Sibling Relationships**

According to the literature, among all close relationships (e.g., friends, partners, spouse, etc.), the sibling relationship has been identified as one of the most pervasive and lifelong bonds (Noller, 2005; Rittenour, Myers, & Brann, 2007). The International Database of the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2001; 2013) reports an all-time low and decline in children per woman, down from 2.76 in 2001 to 1.9 in 2013. Although this decline assumes that more people are growing up with fewer or no siblings, the majority of people in the United States have at least one sibling (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2013).

Goetting (1986) identified three stages that sibling relationships progress through during the life cycle, which includes: (1) childhood and adolescence, (2) early and middle adulthood, and (3) old age. The first stage during childhood and adolescence begins during infancy and lasts when the sibling enters teen years (Goetting, 1986; Rittenour et al., 2007). During this stage, siblings provide each other with emotional support, companionship, and assist in the formation of sibling coalitions (e.g., dealing with parents together) (Rittenour et al., 2007; Stewart, Kozak, Tingley, Goddard, Blake, & Cassel, 2001). Coalitions foster sibling solidarity and challenge the power in other familial subsystems (International Encyclopedia of Marriage and Family, 2003). This first stage is a time where siblings compete with one another for resources (emotional and monetary) from their parents, such as affection, time, money, attention, etc. (Rittenour et al., 2007).

The second stage of sibling relationships is early and middle adulthood, which is typically when siblings no longer live with parents and often is also a time of siblings
creating families of their own (Rittenour et al., 2007). During the early to middle adulthood stage, factors such as marriage, arrival of children, and/or divorce can affect the frequency and type of communication siblings have with one another (Connidis, 1992; Connidis & Campbell, 1995; Rittenour et al., 2007). Previous research indicates that siblings who are unmarried or childless have more contact and rely more on their siblings for social support (Connidis & Campbell, 1995). Siblings typically continue their companionship and support during this stage. Often, this is also a time for caretaking of elderly parents, which depending on the situation, can either strengthen or damage the sibling relationship (Stewart et al., 2001).

The third stage of sibling relationships is identified as siblings in old age (Goetting, 1986). This stage is where siblings typically resolve their rivalries, validate their shared experiences, reminisce about their relationship, and intensifying their emotional bond (Rittenour et al., 2007; Stewart et al., 2001). Variables such as geographic proximity, the change in social networks, socioeconomic status can all impact the relationship and involvement siblings have with each other (Avioli, 1989; Campbell, Connidis, & Davies, 1999; Rittenour et al., 2007). These three stages illustrate the evolution of both the sibling relationships and the role siblings play for each other throughout the lifespan (Rittenour et al., 2007).

Closeness in sibling relationships varies for a variety of reasons. For example, research indicates that, at all ages, sisters are reported to be closer to one another than brothers or cross-sex sibling pairs (International Encyclopedia of Marriage & Family, 2003). Positions and sex may also dictate the role behavior of siblings, for example, roles of the leader and caretaker (International Encyclopedia of Marriage & Family,
The sibling relationship is the first relationship where children experience fairness and justice, which is an essential experience for individuals, and provides the foundation for relationship ethics (International Encyclopedia of Marriage & Family, 2003).

Sibling relationships, one of the family subsystems, are shown to be important and lifelong, yet research in the MFT field has virtually ignored this relationship in the literature. Other subsystems have been extensively researched, e.g., couple subsystems (e.g., Greenberg, Warwar, & Malcolm, 2010; Knudson-Martin et al., 2015; Legaree et al., 2007) and parent-child subsystems (e.g., Byng-Hall, 1995; Solomon, Ono, Timmer, & Goodlin-Jones, 2008; Timmer et al., 2005). The adult sibling subsystem however has only been researched minimally in the MFT literature, especially when linked with the topics of forgiveness and relational ethics. Therefore the following section will discuss the MFT literature on the topic of forgiveness.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness can best be defined as the releasing of negative affect due to a transgression that has occurred, for the purpose of restoring relational and emotional well-being (Hill, 2001). Not surprisingly, forgiveness has been a central topic among researchers in the fields of psychology (e.g., American Psychological Association, 2009; Enright and the Human Development Group, 1991; Enright & North, 1998; Fincham, 2000; Fincham & Beach, 2002; McCullough et al., 2000), counseling (e.g., Philpot & Hornsey, 2010; Toussaint & Webb, 2005; Wade & Worthington, 2005), and MFT (e.g., Gordon & Baucom, 2003; Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder, 2005; Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Hargrave, 1994, 1997; Hill, 2001). Beginning in the 1980s, research literature on
forgiveness was almost non-existent (Enright & The Human Development Group, 1991; Enright & North, 1998; Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder, 2004; Hargrave, 1994; McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000; McCullough & Worthington, 1994; Pingleton, 1989; Worthington & DiBlasio, 1990). Three decades later, there are hundreds of studies and dozens of books focusing on forgiveness (Lyubomirsky, 2008). Lyubomirsky (2008) refers to forgiveness as a shift in thinking, from someone who has wronged a person, with a decrease in desire to harm that person and instead an increase in desire to do him/her good (or to benefit their relationship). Forgiveness, has also been described as, a way to let go of the desire for ill will and revenge toward the transgressor (Lyubomirsky, 2008).

One of the greatest difficulties researchers have faced is agreeing on a definition of what forgiveness is (Hargrave, 1994; Legaree et al., 2007; McCullough et al., 2000; McCullough & Worthington, 1994). One way researchers have conceptualized the concept of forgiveness is by distinguishing what forgiveness is not (e.g., McCullough et al., 2000; McCullough et al., 1997; Enright & North, 1998). Forgiveness in the literature has been mistaken for (or used interchangeable) with other terms such as: reconciliation, condoning, excusing, justifying and forgetting (Lyubomirsky, 2008; Mayo Clinic, 2014; McCullough et al., 2000; McCullough, Rachal, Sandage, Worthington, Brown, & Hight, 1998; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; Sells & Hargrave, 1998).

Forgiveness is different from condoning or excusing one’s behavior, as forgiveness is not dependent on excusing or justifying the harmful act (McCullough et al., 2000). In addition, forgiveness does not imply that the “victim” is willing to reconcile the relationship and be in a position to be harmed again (Lyubomirsky, 2008). Forgiveness
and the act of forgetting should not be implied to go hand in hand (Lyubomirsky, 2008; Mayo Clinic, 2014). In order for forgiveness to occur, it is required that a person does not forget the wrong that occurred, so a choice can be made about letting go or pursuing revenge (Lyubomirsky, 2008).

Forgiveness, according to the research literature, is believed to have numerous physical and emotional benefits (Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2004; Gordon et al., 2005; McNulty, 2008). For example, on an emotional level, forgiveness has been hypothesized to be one of the most important relational processes for repairing relationships (Hargrave & Sells, 1997; Hill, 2010; McCullough et al., 2000). Previous studies on forgiveness in marital and couple relationships indicate the impact forgiveness has with a tendency to behave more positively in relationships (Fincham et al., 2004). Forgiveness has been linked to more satisfaction in relationships, both marital and familial relationship satisfaction (Apel, 2009; Bradbury & Fincham, 1990). Forgiveness has also been associated with greater spiritual and psychological well being, higher self-esteem, and a decrease in anxiety and depression (Mayo Clinic, 2014; Lyubomirsky, 2008). Forgiveness has been reported to decrease physiological symptoms, such as stress-related health issues, lower blood pressure, increase immune system functions, and lower rates of heart disease (Lyubomirsky, 2008; Mayo Clinic, 2014).

**Objectives and Implications for Current Research Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate forgiveness in adult sibling relationships and the role of relational ethics. Specifically, this study examined the following research questions:
1. What is the relationship between relational ethics and adult sibling forgiveness?

2. Does forgiveness increase relational satisfaction in adult sibling relationships?

3. What is the relationship between relational ethics and relational satisfaction in adult sibling relationships?

4. Does relational satisfaction mediate the relationship between relational ethics and forgiveness in adult sibling relationships?

The goal of this study was to increase understanding and knowledge of adult sibling relationships. As noted earlier in this chapter, the sibling relationship has been virtually ignored in the literature, especially in the MFT field. It is important to understand this subsystem, as previous research indicated that siblings often play an important role for one another throughout their lifespan (Goetting, 1986; Noller, 2005; Rittenour et al., 2007). This study hoped to gain an understanding of how relational ethics and forgiveness impacts the adult sibling relationship and whether or not this increases relational satisfaction in adult sibling relationships. As noted previously, forgiveness has been said to be one of the most impactful relational and psychological processes for promoting healing in relationships (Hill, 2001). Adding the understanding of relational ethics, as well as the impact of forgiveness on adult sibling relationships will add empirical research on the family subsystem (adult siblings) previously not studied in the MFT field.
Operational Terms and Definitions

This section will present the operational terms and definitions used throughout this study.

**Adult siblings.** Since this study focused on the subsystem of adult sibling relationships, adult siblings will be defined as two or more individuals who are at least 18 years of age, who are connected either by blood or by parental relationship, and share social and emotional connection through family.

**Referent sibling.** This term refers to the participant’s sibling they will choose to use throughout the entire questionnaire. Participants were instructed to choose one adult sibling and to consistently refer to this sibling throughout the instrument.

**Contextual Family Theory.** Contextual Family Theory is a transgenerational model that focuses on the ethical dilemmas that exist in familial relationships (Boszoremenyi-Nagy, 1987).

**Forgiveness.** Forgiveness will be defined as the process of letting go of negative affect due to a transgression that has occurred, for the purpose of restoring relational and emotional well being (Hill, 2001).

**Marriage and Family Therapists (MFT).** The American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (AAMFT) define Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) as a mental health professional who views the family as a part of a larger system, even when working with an individual, using brief, solution-focused techniques with specific and attainable therapeutic goals (AAMFT, 2015).

**Relational ethics.** For the purpose of this study, Contextual Family Theory’s term of relational ethics will be defined as the degree to which each member of the
family accepts accountability for his or her actions and how actions are impactful on each family member (Grames et al., 2008).

**Summary**

Over the past 40 years, the field of MFT has grown and matured, offering many well established theories and models focusing on family relationships (Nichols & Schwartz, 2012). Although an abundance of research can be found that includes the entire family system (e.g., Hackbarth et al., 2011; Klever, 2009; Ungar, 2015), subsystems such as parent-child relationships (e.g., Byng-Hall, 1995; Solomon et al., 2008) and couple dyads (e.g., Gangamma et al., 2014; Greenberg et al., 2010, Legaree et al., 2007), very little to no research is available on adult sibling dyads (Apel, 2009). Adult sibling relationships have been identified as one of the most persistent and lifelong relationships; therefore, investigating this relationship more fully will add relevant information to the field of MFT (Noller, 2005). Very little empirical research has been done to test the tenets of the Contextual model, which is surprising since it is a well-known and popular MFT theory (Grames, 2008). The research that has investigated the Contextual theory has examined family relationships such as within romantic relationships (e.g., Adkins, 2010; Gangamma, 2008; Gangamma & Bartle-Haring, 2012; Hargrave et al., 1991), and one study that investigated the entire family system and the adolescent sibling subsystem (Chambliss et al., 1992); however, this theory has not been used to specifically investigate relational ethics and forgiveness in adult sibling relationships. The goal of this study was to increase understanding and knowledge of adult sibling relationships in the field of MFT. In addition, this study aimed to
understand how relational ethics and forgiveness play a role in the satisfaction of adult sibling relationships.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review discusses the evolution and foundational principles of the field of MFT, with an emphasis on the Contextual model. A discussion about sibling relationships is presented, in particular, the uniqueness of adult sibling relationships and the limited research on this topic. An examination of the theoretical and conceptual distinctions of forgiveness will be addressed, with an emphasis on forgiveness in familial relationships. Lastly, a discussion of forgiveness within the field of MFT is investigated, with an emphasis on the prior research, as well as constructs, such as empathy, relational satisfaction, and long-term benefits, and how these constructs relate to forgiveness.

The field of Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) offers numerous theories (such as Bowenian Family Therapy, Contextual Family Therapy, Structural Family Therapy, Feminist Family Therapy, etc.) for MFT therapists to choose from when working with couples and families. All of these theories operate from similar principle, called “systemic thinking,” which views individuals as a part of a system and emphasizes communication (Nichols & Schwartz, 2012). Based on the idea of cybernetics and general system theory, these theoretical models suggest that regardless of the origin of the problem, or whether the clients consider it an “individual” or “family” issue, it is beneficial for clients to involve families in the problem solutions (Becvar & Becvar,
2012). These principles provide a foundation for each of the MFT theories that make up the field of Marriage and Family Therapy.

The family therapy movement began in the 1950s, with the work of Gregory Bateson, and his colleagues Haley, Jackson, Weakland, Fry, and followed by Satir, Watzlawick, and others – at Palo Alto, California, who first introduced the ideas of cybernetic and general systems theory to the field of psychology and psychotherapy (Nichols & Schwartz, 2012). These theorists challenged the original linear thinking of psychology by proposing the ideas of feedback and homeostatic rules in communication, which they referred to as circular causality (Becvar & Becvar, 2012; Nichols & Schwartz, 2012). These systemic ideas grew in popularity, and by the mid 1960s, distinct schools of family therapy began to develop (Nichols & Nichols, 2012). This includes the work from the Mental Research Institute group (MRI), who developed Brief Strategic Family Therapy, the Milan Systems Model, Salvador Minuchin’s Structural Family Therapy, and the Intergenerational theories of Murray Bowen, Ivan Borszormenyi-Nagy, James Framo and Norman Paul, who present different theories about the intergenerational transmission of health and dysfunction, and deal with at least three generations of a family (either in person or conceptually) in therapy sessions (Nichols & Schwartz, 2012).

Although each of these theories provide a distinct way of understanding the family system, this study will focus on Ivan Borszormenyi-Nagy’s Intergenerational model of Contextual Theory. This particular model offers valuable ideas to understanding the unique nature of sibling relationships. The next section of this
literature review will present the development of this theory and the fundamental principles, with an emphasis on relational ethics.

**Contextual Theory**

Contextual Theory, developed by Bozsermenyi-Nagy, is founded on the principles of philosophy, psychoanalysis, psychiatry, and systems theories (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986). Although this model is considered to be a systems theory, this model focuses on the importance of the individual within the family system (Gangamma, 2008). The goal of this model is to heal the pain of the individual, while simultaneously promoting change in the family system (Gangamma, 2008).

Boszormenyi-Nagy and colleagues (1991) discuss how family loyalty issues, fairness, and trust are considered the cornerstones of the Contextual Theory approach. Contextual Theory became a widely used approach in the field of MFT, with an emphasis on relational ethics being the motivation for change (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986; Grames et al., 2008). The following sections will provide an overview of the development of Contextual Theory; a discussion of the four dimensions the Contextual theory introduces, with an emphasis on relational ethics, as well as the link between Contextual Theory and forgiveness, more specifically, sibling forgiveness.

**The Development of the Contextual Theory**

Contextual Theory, founded by Boszormenyi-Nagy, began similarly to other MFT theories, by studying individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1987). In addition to the influence of psychology and family systems in developing this theory, Boszormenyi-Nagy was influenced mostly by Martin Buber (Gangamma, 2008). Buber was a philosopher who believed that genuine dialogue
occurs where individuals take the “I-Thou” stance, which he explained as representing the responsibility that our actions have consequences (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1996). Contextual Theory suggests that individuals participating in the system must take responsibility in order for the system to be held responsible. Buber’s “I-Thou” concept refers to “each person’s presence, directness, and immediacy (that) characterize the moment in which two people genuinely care about each other’s side” (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986, p. 33). This “I-Thou” perspective suggests that each person is able to consider the other’s perspective and being present in the relationship, rather than being consumed by biases, prejudices, or his or her own thoughts (Gangamma, 2008).

In addition to Buber’s concept of the “I-Thou” stance, Contextual Theory was also influenced by Buber’s idea of “the justice of human order”; that occurs between human beings in society (Friedman, 1989). Boszormenyi-Nagy applied this idea to interpersonal relationships, where fairness or justice occurs out of the need to balance between two or more individuals’ “subjective, self-serving rights and entitlements” (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1987, p. 306). Boszormenyi-Nagy and Krasner (1986) suggested that, in relationships, justice is essential, and when there is an imbalance of fairness (e.g., an individual’s entitlements overriding the others’), symptoms occur. This theory suggests that “responsible responding” serves as an important foundation of this theory (Gangamma, 2008, p. 8).

The foundational principles of Contextual Theory helped to create Boszormenyi-Nagy’s idea of the four interlocking dimensions of this model, which include facts, individual psychology, transactions, and relational ethics (Boszormenyi-Nagy et al., 1991). The following section will discuss these four dimensions of what he described
as, “the four dimensions of relational reality” (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986, p 44). Lastly, an emphasis on the fourth dimension relational ethics will be discussed.

**Contextual Theory: The Four Dimensions**

Boszormenyi-Nagy and Krasner (1986) outlined four dimensions of the Contextual Theory that is described as, “a juxtaposition of the needs, characteristics, life interests, and relational configurations of all the members of a given family” (p. 44). These four dimensions provide a thorough understanding of family development and change that occurs over a period of time (Gangamma, 2008). These four dimensions include *Facts, Individual Psychology, Transactional Patterns, and the Ethic of Due Consideration: Merited Trust* (referred to as relational ethics). According to Boszormenyi-Nagy and Krasner (1986), the four dimensions help in understanding situations that include (1) individuals and their relating partners; (2) the impact of the family of origin and transactions have had on them, their relationships, and their behavior; (3) the potential and real consequences of each person’s impact on posterity; and (4) the existential conflicts that are inherent to relationships (Adkins, 2010). Each of these four dimensions will be discussed in the following subsections.

**Facts.** Facts are described as the events and reality that cannot be contested (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986). These include genetic inheritance, medical issues, relational histories, and life experiences (Adkins, 2010). It is important to understand that these factors cannot be changed and are considered unavoidable. These facts can have a powerful impact on the development of a family, and can ultimately change the family interaction pattern. For example, the illness of a family member or the birth of a child changes the way members among families interact (Gangamma,
In addition to unavoidable realities that are identified as facts, Boszormenyi-Nagy, Grunebaum and Ulrich (1991) discussed situations that are considered avoidable, such as created realities that eventually become facts. An example would be unresolved conflict between parents that result in a split loyalty for the child (Gangamma, 2008). This situation is considered avoidable; however, because of its existence, it becomes a fact in the family for subsequent generations (Boszormenyi-Nagy et al, 1991).

**Individual psychology.** The dimension of individual psychology refers to understanding of each person’s interpretation of the world. This facet refers to the individual’s internal world, which includes motivations that drive human behavior (Bernal, Rodriguez, & Diamond, 1990). Although Contextual Theory is a systemic, relational model, Boszormenyi-Nagy also acknowledges the individual’s unique and intrapersonal experience of the family (Adkins, 2010). Boszormenyi-Nagy (1996) discussed how the individual’s psychological factors contribute to the meaning and strength of relationships, which ultimately affect the development of the family. This is the first systemic theory to include the importance of individual psychology; however, it should be emphasized that this model views individual factors in the context of relationships (Gangamma, 2008). For example, in Buber’s theory that discussed the “I-Thou” relationship, “the “I” cannot exist in the absence of the “Thou” or without dialogue between “I and Thou” (Gangamma, 2008, p. 11). This phrase clearly illustrates Boszormenyi-Nagy’s view of individual psychology and how it relates to relationships.

**Transactional patterns.** The transactional dimension of Contextual Theory is similar to General Systems Theory and the systemic nature in MFT. For example, this
aspect discusses the patterns that occur in families that affect all members, similar to the view of circularity (Adkins, 2010; Gangamma, 2008). This dimension supports the idea that each family system exhibits certain patterns governed by rules and roles, and family systems either maintain status quo or produce change (Minuchin, 1974; Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). According to Goldenthal (1996), this third dimension of the Contextual Theory refers to issues such as “patterns of communication among family members, triangulation, coalitions, boundaries within family members and between the family environment, family roles and the potential for scapegoating, and issues of interpersonal power and control” (p. 6).

**Relational ethics.** The fourth dimension of the Contextual model, relational ethics, is considered the most compelling component and one that can produce change when used as an intervention (Adkins, 2010; Grames et al., 2008). Boszormenyi-Nagy (1996) defined this dimension as, “an intrinsic dynamic property of human relationships according to which each party to the relationship is inherently accountable to the other” (p. 374). Relational ethics suggests that each member of the family accepts accountability for his or her actions and how actions are impactful on all relational members (Grames et al., 2008). Boszormenyi-Nagy (1987) proposed that when accountability is not taken and when relationships become imbalanced, this may causes a surplus of problems, such as depression, eating disorders, psychosomatic illnesses, stagnant relationships, sexual malfunction, and so on. The concepts of trust, loyalty and entitlement are considered the cornerstones of relational ethics (Gangamma, 2008). Trust is identified as the primary relational source from which we learn how to interact in relationships (Hargrave & Pfitzer, 2003). Trust is an essential factor in relationships,
and can either be inherent or earned (Gangamma, 2008). Loyalty is identified as, “the bond that exists between parents and their children and also with other significant figures in an individual’s life” (Gangamma, 2008, p. 13). Lastly, entitlement is defined as an “ethical guarantee” of being cared for, which exists in relationships that are earned through actions that merit trust (Boszormenyi-Nagy, & Krasner, 1986).

Hargrave and Pfitzer (2003) discussed relational ethics in reference to both horizontal and vertical relationships. In horizontal relationships, which are relationships among equals, such as husband and wife, both individuals are entitled to receive and give respect, love, intimacy, fidelity, financial responsibility, and care. When a horizontal relationship is balanced, the focus is on giving these things rather than what they are entitled to (Grames et al., 2008). However, in cases where there is an imbalance in the relationship, for example, if one partner is unfaithful or controlling resources, the other partner may become angry, manipulative, depressed, consider separation or divorce, or even have an affair as well, in order to seek what is entitled to them (Grames et al., 2008). In vertical relationships, which are identified as parent-child relationships, or relationships across generations, interactions are naturally trust generating (Hargrave & Pfitzer, 2003). As Boszormenyi-Nagy (1987) described, the accountability in parental relationships and filial loyalty create an interdependence that is unable to be replicated.

The nature of destructive entitlements. Contextual theory is a transgenerational theory; therefore, it is important to note that relational ethics is considered to be intergenerational (Hargrave et al., 1991). Hargrave and colleagues (1991) described how individuals either inherit a legacy of balance and fairness in their relationships or an imbalance and unfairness in their relationships. It is said that if the individual
experiences fair and balanced exchanges in their relationships, they will most likely carry this forward. However, if they have experienced injustice in their relationships and have not received “entitlements,” then he or she is more likely to develop destructive entitlements (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986). Destructive entitlement is a result of victimization, which predisposes individuals to engage in harmful and repetitive actions that affect others that are not the ones who victimized them and can be considered innocent (Gangamma, 2008). Hargrave and colleagues (1991) described this as “an intense cycle of loyalty and entitlement that originates in past relationships and is passed along in a slate of distrust and injustice” (p. 147). It is said that this “revolving slate” of loyalties that is reinforced by destructive entitlements is a factor in family dysfunction (Boszormenyi-Nagy et al., 1991).

Thus, relational ethics is considered to be the cornerstone of Contextual Theory (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986; Gangamma, 2008; Grames et al., 2008). Relational ethics ties together both the individual and relational realities, and has an effect on relationship within and across generations (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1987; Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986). Individuals are responsible for the actions on the relational ledger, not only for themselves, but also for the consequences of their actions on others (Gangamma, 2008). This relational dimension clearly illustrates how it is impactful on both the psychological dimension of the individual, as well as the systemic dimension of the family (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973).

**Relational Ethics Research**

Very few studies have investigated the theoretical underpinnings of Contextual Theory (Grames, 2008). Majority of the research that has investigated this theory has
been specifically on relational ethics (Grames, 2008). The following section will discuss the few studies that were found that have examined this concept of Contextual Theory, which include a study on relational ethics and intimate partner violence, a study investigating relational ethics in couple relationships who are in therapy, and one study from 1992 that looked at relational ethics within the familial system, and specifically investigated both parental and adolescent sibling relational ethics.

Adkins (2010) conducted a study that investigated the role of relational ethics with partners of intimate partner violence. With 100 subjects, this study used 50 participants (25 couples) that were recruited from two agencies that have reported experiencing domestic violence, and 50 student participants (25 couples) that were recruited from a university in the Midwest who did not report experiencing domestic violence and where at least one member was a student (Adkins, 2010). Using the Relationship Ethics Scale (RES; Hargrave et al., 1991), relationship violence and aggression were measured with the conflict tactics, and attachment measures for the family of origin and family of procreation scale (CTS; Straus, 1979) (Adkins, 2010). Overall, this study found results of the Structural Equational Modeling (SEM) to show significant links between relationship ethics and IPV consistent with Contextual theory conceptualization of IPV (Adkins, 2010).

A study conducted by Gangamma and Bartle-Haring (2012) investigated relationship ethics in couples in therapy. The purpose of this study was to examine what impact fairness has on relational satisfaction in couple relationships, measured by the Relational Ethics Scale (RES) (Gangamma & Bartle-Haring, 2012). This study utilized a convenience sample of 68 heterosexual couples seeking therapy at a large Midwestern
University’s Couple and Family Therapy (CFT) training clinic (Gangamma & Bartle-Haring, 2012). Findings from this study indicated a significant correlation between both partners’ reports of relationship dissatisfaction and unfairness (Gangamma & Bartle-Haring, 2012). This study suggested that these findings produce a strong argument for the need to address fairness in couple’s therapy (Gangamma & Bartle-Haring, 2012).

Chambliss and colleagues (1992) investigated adolescent relational functioning with their family using the Relational Ethics Scale (RES, 1994). This study developed the sibling/RES subscale in order to measure the participant’s relationship with their identified sibling (Chambliss et al., 1992). As this study hypothesized, adolescents from dysfunctional families evaluated their familial relationships more negatively than those from functional families (Chambliss et al., 1992). Gender differences were also found, for example, females had a greater tendency to describe their siblings as “good listeners who value their thoughts,” as well as females having a higher expectation of their family relationships than males (Chambliss et al., 1992, p. 13). Lastly, this study found that, for all subjects, adolescents rated their horizontal relationships (both friends and siblings) more positively than their overall familial relationships (Chambliss et al., 1992). The above studies are examples of current research that investigated relational ethics in familial relationships; however, despite a careful literature review, only one study was found that looked at relational ethics in sibling relationships.

After a thorough literature search, including working with the local research librarian and using search terms such as relational ethics, contextual theory, ethics in sibling relationships, and sibling relationships, the above study is the only study this author found that investigated the impact of relational ethics on sibling relationships.
The majority of the research investigating relational ethics in family relationships examines either couple relationships (e.g., Adkins, 2010; Gangamma & Bartle-Haring, 2012) or parent-child relationships (Chambliss et al., 1992); however, none of these studies have examined relational ethics and the role of forgiveness in sibling relationships. Contextual Theory has been described and used extensively in clinical and theoretical literature (e.g., Boszormenyi-Nagy and Krasner 1986; Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark 1973; Goldenthal 1996; Hargrave et al. 1991); however, very few studies have been done to test the theoretical foundations of the model (Grames, 2008). Clinicians report that this theory has been helpful in their work with families, including children, adolescents, and couples (Jones & Flickinger 1987; Lee 1995), and aging adults (Anderson & Hargrave 1990; Hargrave & Anderson 1990; Hargrave & Hanna 1997; Jones & Flickinger 1987); however, more research is needed to understand how this theory is helpful in understanding family relationships. With the sibling relationship being considered a lifelong relationship an individual has, as well as the lack of existing research, it is important to investigate this familial relationship further (Myers, 1998). The following section will discuss the previous research on adult siblings, with an emphasis on the lack of up-to-date research and limited available studies.

**Adult Sibling Relationships**

Sibling relationships are considered unique, involuntary relationships, which are unlike any other relationships individual’s experience (Myers, 1998). The majority of the research on the topic of family communication looks at the entire family or the marital relationship, rather than the sibling dyad (Apel, 2009). Fitzpatrick and Badzinski (1994) reported that 80% of individuals spend at least one third of their lives with their
siblings, which signifies the lifelong relationship of siblings. Past research on family relationships suggested that previous studies have looked at the entire family rather than the varying experiences of siblings within the same family (Noller, 2005). In addition, Pike and colleagues (2000) explained that previous research on the topic has tended to “treat the family as a monolithic unit” (p. 96). This lack of research on this unique relationship suggests that it may be worthy to investigate how adult siblings view forgiveness in their relationship (Apel, 2009).

Research investigating sibling relationships mostly comes from western, industrialized countries (Noller, 2005). In this type of society, many siblings report growing up and live together in the same home, share daily interactions, and report similar experiences (Apel, 2009). Deater-Deckard, Dunn, and Lussier (2002) suggested several motives to study sibling relationships. First, siblings tend to maintain a consistent agent in most children’s lives, especially in middle childhood, which is considered to be a fundamental stage in a child’s development (Apel, 2009). Second, siblings report that they often play a supportive role to each other during difficult familial times, for example, divorce among parents, remarriage and blending between families, illnesses in families, and other major transitional life events (Apel, 2009). Lastly, sibling relationships are usually ambivalent, for example, siblings tend to experience considerable amounts of conflict and negativity as well as warmth and support (Apel, 2009). The various roles that siblings play in relationships, such as the role of a friend, teacher, competitor, and manager, indicate the amount of flexibility that is required for this relationship (Martin, Anderson, Burant, & Weber, 1997). Therefore,
communication and forgiveness play an important role in this relationship when conflict arises, and may be the most effective tool in repairing this relationship (Apel, 2009).

**Sibling Research**

Research on the topic of siblings has been looked at in a variety of contexts, for example, age development (Brody, 1998; 2004), personality characteristics of siblings (Menesini, Camodeca, & Nocentini, 2010; Michalski & Shackelford, 2002), and gender of siblings (Jensen & McHale, 2015; Schwartz & Beaver, 2014). Most of the research on the topic of siblings looked at this relationship through childhood or adolescence, or as siblings get older, such as in caretaking for parents or when they become elderly (Campione-Barr & Killoren, 2015). There is a large amount of literature on the topic that investigated sibling relationships during childhood, sibling temperament, family constellation variables, for example birth order, and the parent-child relationship (Cicirelli, 1989; Connidis, 1994; Menesini, Camodeca, & Nocentini, 2010; Riggio, 2000; Wilson, Calsyn, & Orlofsky, 1994). The following section will describe some of the research available on sibling relationships, as well as discuss the need for more research on this topic.

The majority of the available research on the topic of adult sibling relationships examines the quality of the adult relationship in older sibling populations. This includes care-taking behaviors (Connidis, 1994; Goetting, 1986), how siblings provide social support to one another (Cicirelli, 1989; Riggio, 2000), and how siblings remain friends in later life (Goetting, 1986, Gold, 1989; Riggio, 2000; Wilson et al., 1994). These studies presented similar findings, in that older siblings tend to turn toward each other for companionship and psychological support (Scott, 1983), as well as helping one
another in time of crisis (Cicirelli, 1989; Connidis, 1994). In regards to siblings in middle to late adulthood, siblings report generally feeling close and accepting toward one another (Bedford, 1989; Gold, 1989). The subsequent section will focus on the available studies on sibling relationships in early adulthood, across the lifespan, as well as a study that investigates the nature of sibling typologies and measure to classify adult sibling relationships. Lastly, a discussion about clinical research published by Lewis (2015) on adult sibling relationships will be briefly reviewed.

One study conducted by Goetting (1989) investigated sibling relationships over the lifespan. Specifically, Goetting (1989) developed a description of the “developmental tasks of siblingship” over childhood and adolescence, early and middle adulthood, and old age (p. 301). Findings from this study indicate that siblings typically develop emotional support and companionship during childhood and adolescence (Goetting, 1989). In addition to maintaining support and companionship, in middle adulthood siblings also assist in caretaking of elderly parents or the parental estate (Goetting, 1989). Lastly, siblings during old age remain companions toward one another, support each other, reminisce about the past, and potentially resolve conflict or rivalry that was present in the relationship (Goetting, 1989). This study illustrates that siblings provide support and care for one another throughout the lifespan (Goetting, 1989; Stewart et al., 2001).

A study by Stocker and colleagues (1997) was conducted to investigate sibling relationships in early adulthood, specifically to describe the nature of sibling relationships and examine the correlates of individual differences in adult sibling relationships (Stocker et al., 1997). These researchers developed the Adult Sibling
Relationship Questionnaire (Stocker et al., 1997) using two samples (N = 383) (Stocker et al., 1997). This scale is aimed to identifying adult perceptions of sibling relationships, specifically detecting the psychological meaning of the relationship and the felt support or conflict that resides in this relationship (Stocker et al., 1997). The results from this study showed siblings in early adulthood have relationships that are characterized by dimensions of warmth, conflict, and rivalry (Stocker et al., 1997).

Stewart and colleagues (2001) conducted two studies for the purpose of examining the nature of sibling typologies and to introduce a new measure that is designed to classify the type of sibling relationship. In the first study, a sample size of 172 participants that ranged from 18 years of age to 65 years of age were asked to describe their current sibling relationship using a new measure called the Sibling Type Questionnaire (STQ) (Stewart et al., 2001). Five dimensions were used in a cluster analysis to partition the sample into five groups: supportive, longing, competitive, apathetic, and hostile (Stewart et al., 2001). The purpose of the second part of this two-part study was to validate the classifications by the STQ by acquiring narrative descriptions from a representative sample of adults (N = 658), ranging in age from 18 to 86. This study successfully validated the classifications of sibling relationships provided by the Sibling Type Questionnaire as well as complement the existing literature regarding sibling relationships (Stewart et al., 2001). For example, younger children who are 12 years old or less are identified as being “buddies, caregivers, or casual with respect to their siblings” (Stewart et al., 2001, p. 20). At the other end of the lifespan, siblings who are 65 years or older identify their sibling relationship as “intimate,
congenial, loyal, apathetic, or hostile” (Stewart et al., 2001, p. 20). This study provides a holistic understanding of the sibling relationship throughout the lifespan.

A study conducted by Scharf, Shulman, and Avigad-Spitz (2005) investigated the role of sibling relationships in emerging adulthood and adolescence. This study included 116 emerging adults and adolescent participants who completed questionnaires and were interviewed about their relationship with a sibling (Scharf et al., 2005). In addition, the respondents’ siblings and their mothers rated the quality of the sibling relationship (Scharf et al., 2005). Results from this study indicated that emerging adults were found to spend less time and to be less involved in joint activities with their siblings than adolescents, but reported having more emotional exchanges with and feeling more warmth toward their siblings (Scharf et al., 2005). Conflict and rivalry was more prevalent in emerging adults than by adolescents (Scharf et al., 2005). This study illustrates the changes that occur in sibling relationships from adolescence to young adulthood.

Lewis (2015) is a clinician who resides in Silver Spring, Maryland, and has published a book about her clinical work with adult sibling relationships. Lewis discussed how she gained an understanding of sibling relationships through her clinical work, when the topic of sibling relationships emerged often when working with individuals and families. In her book, *Siblings: The Ghosts of Childhood That Haunt Your Love and Work*, she described how sibling relationships became a theme in her client’s presenting concerns, so she began to assess this relationship more in depth in her practice. Through doing this, she discussed themes and patterns that exist in this relationship and how it is influential in other relationships for clients she treated.
Although not research based, she is the only clinician found to have published her clinical experience on the topic of adult sibling relationships. Lewis reported how sibling relationships provide a foundation for other relationships individual’s experience. She suggested that understanding this relationship in more depth will provide a greater understanding in other relationships, such as family of origin relationships and intimate partner relationships. In her book, Lewis made a call for more research needed on this unique and often overlooked subsystem in the family.

The previous research on the topic of sibling relationships illustrates the involuntary nature of this unique relationship. As previously noted, the sibling relationship is a lifelong relationship, which typically remains consistent throughout the lifespan. With previous studies that have investigated this relationship regarding caretaking behaviors, friendships, and support, one area that has not been thoroughly investigated is how forgiveness plays a role in sibling relationships, especially within the field of MFT. Lewis (2015) provided important insight into the adult sibling relationship from a clinical standpoint; however, due to this being grounded in clinical practice and not research, further examination in adult sibling relationships is needed. The following section will discuss the importance of forgiveness, the many conceptualizations of forgiveness among researchers, the role forgiveness plays in the field of MFT and the outcome studies available on the topic, as well as the limited available research on forgiveness in family relationships.

**Importance of Forgiveness**

Researchers have argued that forgiveness may be one of the most essential psychological and relational processes for amending estrangement between individuals
A quote by Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1998) illustrated the importance forgiveness has on relationships: “forgiveness is an absolute necessity for continued human existence” (p. xiii). This quote highlights the connection that forgiveness has with emotional and spiritual healing (Hill, 2010). Although there are many theoretical frameworks and assumptions associated with the concept of forgiveness found in the literature, little empirical research has been conducted, especially prior to the 1980s (Enright & North, 1998; Hargrave & Sells, 1997; Hill, 2010; McCullough et al., 2000; Sells & Hargrave, 1998). In more recent years, research on the topic of forgiveness has shown an increase in interest, especially due to the funding from the Templeton Foundation (Legaree et al., 2007; McCullough et al., 2000). As of the last 10 years, a plethora of research is available on forgiveness within marital relationships; however, one area that has not been well researched is forgiveness within other familial relationships. The following section will review the many conceptualizations of forgiveness available in the literature, followed by research on the concept of forgiveness within the MFT field. This will include the tie forgiveness has to other constructs, such as empathy and relational satisfaction, and the impact forgiveness has on long-term relational and health benefits. Lastly, a review of the outcome studies on the topic of forgiveness will be reviewed.

**Conceptualizations of Forgiveness**

One of the largest issues for research on the topic of forgiveness is the lack of consensus regarding how to define this concept (Hill, 2010). Forgiveness has been defined as motivational-based (McCullough et al., 1997). For example, McCullough and colleagues (1997) defined forgiveness as a set of changes that occur motivationally
where one becomes (a) less motivated to retaliate against the offending person, (b) has a decrease in motivation to continue disengagement or estrangement from the offender, and (c) has a desire for reconciliation out of the goodwill for the offender, regardless of the hurtful actions by the offender. Fincham and colleagues (2002) have also offered a motivational-based definition of forgiveness as, “a transformation in which motivation to seek revenge and to avoid contact with the transgressor is lessened and prosocial motivation toward the transgressor is increased” (p. 27).

Several researchers in this field focus on the relational components of forgiveness in their conceptualizations. Younger, Piferi, Jobe, and Lawler (2004) suggested that forgiveness be defined as a relational process of releasing negative affect for the purpose of maintaining a relationship. Similar to this definition, forgiveness has been defined as an intentional and voluntary process by which a victim undergoes a change in feelings and attitude regarding a transgression, lets go of negative emotions such as vengefulness, with an increased ability to wish the offender well (American Psychological Association, 2009). Forgiveness has also been defined as a process, or the result of a process, which involves a change in attitude and emotion regarding the offender (Philpot, 2006).

In addition to the motivational and relational aspects of defining forgiveness, other researchers have suggested that forgiveness should be defined as a coping mechanism (Kelly & Waldron, 2006; Waldron & Kelly, 2008), or as a way to maintain the relationship (Younger et al., 2004). For example, Hargrave (1994) argued that “forgiving demands that the victim enter back into the relationship with the very people that hurt him or her unjustly” (p. 345). Hargrave (1994) also defined forgiveness from a
Contextual Therapy perspective, as reflected in the work of Boszormenyi-Nagy. From this perspective, the issues of justice and trust are thought to be crucial components of relational ethics, which allow family members to feel reciprocity, balance, and trust in their relationships (Hargrave, 1994; Hill, 2010). Thus, working with the concept of forgiveness from the Contextual Therapy framework suggests an opportunity to restore balance, release blame, and assist members in reconciliation (Hill, 2010).

As illustrated by the above conceptualizations of forgiveness, it is clear that there is a lack of consensus on the construct of forgiveness among scholars. Researchers have argued that the lack of consensus on the construct of forgiveness is due to its close tie to other concepts, such as reconciliation (i.e. the restoration of relationships), condoning (i.e., putting up with or dealing with the offense), or excusing (i.e. legitimizing the hurtful act) (Apel, 2009; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Kelley & Waldron, 2006). Most of the research illustrates that forgiveness is most often defined and examined from the victim’s perspective rather than the individual seeking forgiveness (Apel, 2009; Enright & The Human Development Group, 1991; Fincham & Beach, 2002; McCullough et al., 1997). The above studies were selected to present the many ways forgiveness is conceptualized and the discrepancy among researchers in defining this topic. The next section will discuss the forgiveness research available in the MFT field and the MFT forgiveness outcome research available.

**Marriage and Family Therapy Forgiveness Research**

This section will summarize the available research on forgiveness in the field of MFT. First, a definition for empathy and relational satisfaction will be presented, followed by the available studies that have investigated each of these constructs and its
relationship to forgiveness in the field of MFT. Second, a discussion of the long-term benefits of forgiveness will be addressed, specifically, how forgiveness is hypothesized to reduce conflict and increase satisfaction in marital relationships.

**Empathy.** Empathy is defined as one’s ability to feel or imagine another person’s emotional experience (Knafo, Zahn-Waxler, Van Hulle, Robinson, & Rhee, 2008). The ability to empathize is an important part of both emotional and social development, which is thought to affect an individual’s behavior toward others and the quality of social relationships (Knafo et al., 2008). McCullough and colleagues (1998) conducted a research study that investigated using empathy to promote forgiveness, and found that people who were more empathic had a higher likelihood of forgiving than those who did not empathize with the transgressor. According to Hill (2001; 2010), empathy is essential for facilitating the process of forgiveness. He believed that therapists should facilitate an empathic relational environment when working with families, where ambivalence is openly acknowledged, which will allow for the breakthrough of forgiveness (Hill, 2001). Wade and Worthington (2005) reviewed studies that investigated forgiveness interventions and found that empathy was identified as a core factor. Lastly, Hill (2010) also describes forgiveness as a complex relational and psychological process that involves understanding and empathy more than an act of will.

**Relational satisfaction.** Relational satisfaction is defined and “involves one’s position in the relationship, a partner’s meeting of one’s needs, and level of contentment with one’s relationship (compared to others)” (Emmers-Sommers, 2004, p. 402). The previous literature on relational satisfaction suggests that the more time spent together with one’s significant other, leads to positive relational outcomes such as intimacy and
satisfaction (Emmers-Sommers, 2004). In addition, Emmers-Sommers reported that the quality and quantity of communication in the relationship has been positively associated with relational outcomes.

Relational satisfaction has been linked to forgiveness (e.g., Fincham, 2000; Fincham, Hall, & Beach, 2006; Gordon & Baucom, 2003; Kachadourian, Fincham, & Davila, 2004; Paleari, Regalia, & Fincham, 2003). For example, McCullough and colleagues (1998) proposed that couples who confess or apologize in intimate relationships that are identified as satisfying; the more that apology leads to forgiveness. Paleari and colleagues (2003) conducted a study that investigated the association between relational satisfaction and forgiveness and their results indicated that the quality of marriage or relationship quality may predict forgiveness. Lastly, Vaughan (2001) illustrated in his study that trait forgiveness may predict later marital satisfaction. The results from the reported studies indicate a bidirectional association between forgiveness and relational or marital satisfaction.

Apel (2009) conducted a study investigating forgiveness in adult sibling relationships through the lens of Bowlby’s Attachment Theory. Specifically looking at relational satisfaction, this study investigated how one’s attitude toward forgiveness influences relational satisfaction in adult sibling relationships (Apel, 2009). Results from this study indicate a significant correlation between attitude toward forgiveness and relational satisfaction. Results suggested that the more positive people’s attitude toward forgiveness is, the more relational satisfaction they experience in their adult sibling relationship (Apel, 2009). To date, this was the only study found that investigated relational satisfaction and forgiveness in adult sibling relationships. As evidenced by the
above studies, majority of the research investigating relational satisfaction has been examined in the romantic relationships. More research is needed to better understand how relational satisfaction and forgiveness impacts the adult sibling relationship.

**Long-term benefits.** Researchers have identified at least two long-term benefits of forgiveness to marriage and intimate partner relationships (Gordon et al., 2005). First, forgiveness is hypothesized to reduce conflict in marital and couple relationships, and studies have suggested that forgiveness is associated with the tendency to behave more positively in these relationships (Fincham et al., 2004). Second, forgiveness has been thought to enhance partner’s cognitions (McNulty, 2008). Research illustrates that positive attributions tend to be associated with more satisfying marital and partner relationships, and forgiveness is said to be associated with these positive attributions (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990). Forgiveness has been reported to have an indirect link with physical relational, mental, and spiritual health (Harris & Thoresen, 2005; Lawler, Younger, Piferi, Jobe, Edmondson, & Jones, 2005; Toussaint & Webb, 2005; Greenberg et al., 2010).

**Outcome Studies on Forgiveness in MFT**

A discussion of the outcome research available in the field of Marriage and Family Therapy and forgiveness will be discussed in this next section. This will present research on Contextual Family Therapy and forgiveness, Emotion-focused Therapy and forgiveness, and the research available on forgiveness in family relationships.

**Contextual family therapy and forgiveness.** Contextual family therapy has been linked to forgiveness. For example, Hargrave (1994, 1997) conceptualized the issues that cause relational pain from a contextual family therapy perspective. According
to the contextual family therapy perspective, relationship exists in four dimensions: facts, individual psychology, family or systemic transactions and relational ethics (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986; Hargrave, 1997). Relational ethics, the fourth dimension, focuses on the idea of balance of justice, loyalty, trustworthiness, merit, and entitlement between members of a relationship (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986). This is considered the most powerful dimension of the family, and is considered to have the most potential for facilitating change in therapy (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986; Hargrave, 1997). Destructive entitlement occurs when relational injustices are present, a lack of trust.

Pollard, Ruth, Anderson, and Jennings (1998) developed the Family Forgiveness Scale (FFS) for the purpose of measuring forgiveness in the intergenerational family, as reported by an individual family member. Using Contextual Theory and the four interlocking dimensions this theory proposes, which include facts, psychology, transactions, and relational ethics, this scale investigates the forgiveness abilities, perceived by the individual, looking at both their family of origin and their current primary relationship (Pollard et al., 1998). This scale looks at both the roles of the offended and the offender, which differs from most of the forgiveness scales. The FFS examines five areas of forgiveness in their subscales, which include: (a) realization (which refers to the intrapsychic awareness for the offender of the offended), (b) recognition (which refers to an assessment of the incident that caused pain for either the offender or the offended), (c) reparation (which includes confrontation of the incident that caused pain, admitting responsibility, and the reciprocal act of asking for and giving forgiveness), (d) restitution (which refers to making amends by the offender), and (e)
resolution (which indicates the relinquishment of previous hurts by the offender and the offended) (Pollard et al., 1998). Based on data that included 342 subjects, the FFS shows to be both a reliable and valid instrument for measuring family forgiveness (Pollard et al., 1998).

**Emotion focused therapy.** Numerous studies on Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) have focused on forgiveness in the marital and couple relationship (e.g., Greenberg et al., 2010; Meneses & Greenberg, 2014; Zuccarini, Johnson, Dalgleish, & Makinen, 2013). Emotion-focused couple’s counseling emphasizes the relational injuries that occur in couple relationships, the emotional bonds that are formed, and their attachment securities in the relationship (Greenberg et al., 2010). EFT hypothesizes that when couples experience emotional injuries, couples are caught in negative cycles of attack and blame as well as defense and withdrawal (Greenberg et al., 2010). From this perspective, couples’ conflict is understood as emerging from unmet adult needs for attachment (proximity, availability and responsiveness), identity (including having one’s status and identity validated), and liking (excitement, enjoyment, attraction) (Meneses & Greenberg, 2014). Forgiveness plays an important role in EFT due to resolution and apology being required by the perpetrator (Greenberg et al., 2010).

A study conducted by Greenberg and associates (2010) investigated the effectiveness of emotion-focused couple’s therapy for resolving conflict in the couple relationship. A sample of 20 couples who were assessed for experiencing unresolved emotional injuries with their partner were involved in a 10- to 12-session treatment that focused on overcoming betrayal, abandonment, anger that has occurred for at least 2 years (Greenberg et al., 2010). Couples were recruited through advertisements in local
newspapers and screened and excluded if they experienced domestic violence, substance abuse, suicidal ideation and severe psychological disturbances such as dissociation, psychosis, or borderline or narcissistic personality disorders in either partner (Greenberg et al., 2010). Twenty couples completed the therapy treatment and were asked to complete both pre- and posttreatment questionnaire packages (Greenberg et al., 2010). All of the couples reported an emotional injury, which included affairs, abortions (had or not had), perceived abandonment, and perceived humiliations (Greenberg et al., 2010). A specialized EFT treatment manual was developed for this study that focused on facilitating the resolution of the emotional injuries between partners (Greenberg et al., 2010). In addition to the therapy treatment process, a battery of self-report measures was administered both before and after treatment to assess changes (Greenberg et al., 2010). Results from this study indicate that couples involved in this treatment coped better on outcome measures such as relational satisfaction, forgiveness, and trust than compared with couples that did not receive treatment (Greenberg et al., 2010).

A study by Zuccarini and colleagues (2013) investigated how EFT interventions relate to forgiveness and reconciliation in intimate relationships. Specifically, this research study presented a forgiveness reconciliation model, known as the Attachment Injury Resolution Model (AIRM) within the context of EFT for couples (Zuccarini et al., 2013). The AIRM consists of three stages: de-escalation of the injury cycle, new emotional engagement regarding the injury, and consolidation, and eight steps (Zuccarini et al., 2013). The AIRM addresses lingering anger and hurt, as well as providing steps to forgiveness and reconciliation (Zuccarini et al., 2013). This study analyzed nine resolved and nine unresolved EFT couple cases to investigate the client change process,
the validity of the AIRM, and EFT interventions used (Zuccarini et al., 2013). Injured partners consisted of 19 women and 5 men, and reported attachment injuries were identified as actual abandonment, perceived abandonment following a miscarriage, infidelity, flirtation, Internet relationship or friendship with opposite sex, insulting remark, and financial deception/loss (Zuccarini et al., 2013). This study used qualitative research methods in which the primary researcher transcribed therapy talk, and three clinical graduate students were trained to code the results in order to provide inter coder reliability (Zuccarini et al., 2013). Findings from this study suggest resolved couple clients engaged deeply with their internal experience were more deliberate and controlled in their processing and more affiliative in their interpersonal responses in comparison with nonresolved couples (Zuccarini et al., 2013).

Meneses and Greenberg (2014) conducted a study to relate the in-session processes for forgiveness to occur in EFT treatment to outcome. A sample of 33 couples received 10 to 12 sessions of EFT in hopes to resolve various forms of emotional injuries, such as transgressions that violate the expectations of close relationships (Meneses & Greenberg, 2014). Inclusion criteria required participants to be at least 18 years of age, intention to stay in their relationship with the openness to overcoming anger and hurt, and excluded if there was evidence of violence, suicidal ideation, substance abuse, or psychotic symptoms in either partner (Meneses & Greenberg, 2014).

Participants were asked to identify only one emotional injury as the focus on their therapies (Meneses & Greenberg, 2014). The female partner identified as the “injured one” and the male as the “injuring one” in 32 out of the 33 couples (Meneses & Greenberg, 2014). The reported emotional injuries included: infidelity, perceived
abandonment at a time of critical need, abortion decisions, financial deception, difficulties with in-laws, and blackmail in the couple’s shared workplace, and changing religion after marriage (Meneses & Greenberg, 2014). A standard EFT protocol was used in 14 steps/tasks (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008). The goal of the study was to assess how the presence (not the frequency) of three particular components of forgiveness, “the injuring partner’s shame (often embedded in an apology) and the injured partner’s acceptance of the shame (derived from the combination of “empathy” and “shift in view of other” (Meneses & Greenberg, 2014, p. 53).

The results of this study were based on the analyses of 205 videotaped segments of the participant’s couples counseling videos (Meneses & Greenberg, 2014). The primary outcome measure was the degree of change on the injured partner’s forgiveness score, as measured by the Enright Forgiveness Inventory (Meneses & Greenberg, 2014). Two additional measures were included: the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, to measure marital distress and the Trust scale to measure trust (Meneses & Greenberg, 2014). Using hierarchical regression analyses, this study found that the injuring partner’s shame and the injured partner’s acceptance of the shame were found to be significant predictors of residual change on the Enright Forgiveness Inventory (Meneses & Greenberg, 2014). In predicting marital adjustment, changes in levels of marital distress were found to depend on the injured partner’s acceptance of the injuring partner’s shame (Meneses & Greenberg, 2014). Lastly, this study did not find significant results regarding predicting trust (Meneses & Greenberg, 2014).

The following EFT studies illustrate the use of forgiveness in this MFT model, and the importance forgiveness has in couple relationships. Although relevant and
current research is available for the concept of forgiveness in couple relationships through the EFT model, little to no research was found regarding forgiveness in other familial relationships, such as sibling relationships in the field of MFT. The following section will highlight research that has investigated family forgiveness: one study that presents a scale to measure family forgiveness, as well as the research findings from the author’s previous study on forgiveness in adult sibling relationships through the Bowlby’s Attachment Theory lens.

**Forgiveness in family relationships.** Maio, Thomas, Fincham, and Carnelley (2008) developed the Family Forgiveness Questionnaire (FFQ) with the goal of measuring tendencies to forgive others, in addition to measuring the perceptions of forgiveness from others. The measure of the tendency to forgive other family members asked each participant to remember a time that the target family member offended the participant with something that could not be easily excused or understood (Maio et al., 2008). The participant was then asked to rate his or her agreement on eight items relating to forgiveness on a 7-point Likert type scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree (Maio et al., 2008). The perception of forgiveness was measured similarly to the tendency to forgive other family members; however, only four items were used (Maio et al., 2008). The FFQ was designed in order to examine the role of familial relationships in forgiveness, and to verify the reciprocal nature of forgiveness across relationships (Maio et al., 2008).

A study conducted by Apel (2009) investigated seeking forgiveness in adult sibling relationships through the lens of Bowlby’s Attachment Theory. Specifically, this study examined the relationship between seeking forgiveness and attachment style, the
relational outcomes of forgiveness, and forgiveness as a relational maintenance strategy (Apel, 2009). With 172 participants, the results from this study found a significant relationship between secure attachment style and the communication forgiveness tactics. In addition, findings from this study indicate that the more positive individuals’ attitude toward forgiveness the more relational satisfaction they experience in their adult sibling relationship (Apel, 2009). This is the first study to examine the role forgiveness plays in adult sibling relationships, as well as investigating forgiveness-seeking, since majority of the research is from the forgiveness grantor’s perspective. Although this study provides insight into adult sibling relationships and forgiveness, it has thus far not been viewed from a family therapy perspective.

**Summary**

This study was conducted to address the research gap existing today, by exploring how adult siblings use the ideas of relational ethics and forgiveness in their sibling relationships. As illustrated in the above literature review, previous research has investigated the constructs of relational ethics, sibling relationships, and forgiveness separately; however, no study to date has examined these concepts together. Although considered the longest relationship a person will experiences in their life (Cicirelli, 1995), the field of MFT has little to no available research on relational ethics, adult sibling relationships, and forgiveness. This is surprising, since the MFT field is dedicated to the treatment of and research on family relationships; however, this particular relationship is virtually ignored in the MFT literature.

Sibling relationships are considered an involuntary relationship that tends to be a pervasive and a lifelong relationship (International Encyclopedia of Marriage and
Sibling relationships have been shown to be an important familial relationship with closeness varying depending on sex of the sibling, birth positions, familial experience, and attachment bonds (International Encyclopedia of Marriage and Family, 2003; Knudson-Martin, et al., 2015). However, the literature on the adult sibling subsystem in the field of MFT is virtually ignored. It is important to investigate this relationship due to siblings being a consistent agent in each other’s lives and often playing a supportive role to one another during difficult familial times (Deater-Deckard & Lussier, 2002). Due to the various roles that siblings play in one another’s lives (e.g. role of a friend, teacher, and manager), forgiveness may play an important role in this relationship when conflict arises and forgiveness may be the most effective tool in repairing the relationship (Deater-Deckard & Lussier, 2002; Martin, et al., 1997). Therefore, further investigation of this relationship will fill an important gap in the MFT literature that exists today as well as providing therapists with an understanding of the importance this relationship may have for their clients.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter focuses on the purpose of this research as well as the methods utilized to conduct the study. First, a restatement of the problem will be discussed, as well as the proposed research design. Next, an outline of the procedure the study followed and recruitment of participations will be addressed. A detailed discussed of the instruments used in the study will be presented. Lastly, the study’s hypotheses and statistical analyses will be discussed, followed by a summary of the chapter.

Restatement of the Problem

This study examined the relationship between relational ethics, forgiveness, and relational satisfaction in adult sibling relationships. The theoretical framework used in this study is the Contextual family theory (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1987; Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986), which looks at the individual within the family system, and focuses on increasing fairness and accountability in familial relationships (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1996). Although this theory has been applied to family systems, such as marital couples and parent-child relationships, as of to date, no research was found using this model to further understand adult sibling relationships.

Overview of the Present Study

This study examined four hypotheses that investigated adult sibling relationships. Specifically, Hypothesis 1 suggested that higher levels of relational ethics in sibling
relationships are positively and significantly correlated with higher levels of forgiveness. This hypothesis was tested using a correlational analysis using the relational ethics scale (RES) (Hargrave, 1991) and the family forgiveness scale (FFS) (Pollard, et al., 1998).

Hypothesis 2 projected that relational satisfaction in sibling relationships is significantly and positively correlated with forgiveness in sibling relationships. This hypothesis was measured by a correlational analysis using the relational assessment scale (RAS) (Hendrick, 1988) and the family forgiveness scale (FFS) (Pollard, et al., 1998).

Hypothesis 3 speculated that relational ethics in sibling relationships is significantly and positively correlated with relational satisfaction in adult sibling relationships. This hypothesis was measured by using the relational ethics scale (RES) (Hargrave, 1991) and the relational assessment scale (RAS) (Hendrick, 1988) and analyzed using a correlational analysis.

Lastly, the fourth Hypothesis examined to see if relational satisfaction mediated the relationship between relational ethics and sibling forgiveness, such that higher levels of relational ethics will lead to higher levels of relational satisfaction, which in turn would lead to higher levels of forgiveness. This hypothesis used a conditional process analysis to test the mediating relationship between the variables by using the relational ethics scale (RES) (Hargrave, 1991), the relational assessment scale (RAS) (Hendrick, 1988), and the Family Forgiveness Scale (FFS) (Pollard, et al., 1998). The subsequent sections of the chapter will discuss the research design, procedure, instruments, hypotheses, and statistical analyses of this study in more depth.
Research Design

The research design that was used for this investigation was a survey design to examine the relationship between the variables of relational ethics, forgiveness, and relational satisfaction in adult sibling relationships. Heppner, Wampold, and Kivlinghan (2008) identified how an advantage of using survey research methods is potentially high external validity because of sampling from real life settings as well as the ability for this type of research to be generalized to other similar situations. The study was able to gather participants from various geographic regions and across the adult life span (e.g., 18 years of age and older).

A correlational research design was used to describe the relationship between multiple characteristics in this research study. According to Lomax and Li (2013), one advantage of using correlational research is that once variables have been shown to be of importance or interest, correlational research can then be used to examine the relationships among those important variables. Lomax and Li (2013) cautioned that survey and correlational research studies tend to have low internal validity, which should caution inferring causal relationships. Another limitation to correlational analyses is that this method typically suggests that variables are related to one another in a linear manner and when variables are not linearly related, correlational methods will reduce the strength of the relationship (Lomax & Li, 2013). Although there are some limitations, correlational methods have been and continue to be popular in educational and psychological research for quite some time in part because they are foundational in nature in terms of their ability to examine the relations among a number of variables (Lomax, 2007).
A mediation analysis was used to investigate the relationship among the three variables: relational ethics, relational satisfaction, and forgiveness in adult sibling relationships. A mediation analysis developed by Hayes (2009) called Conditional Process Analysis was used to investigate mediating relationships in this study. Conditional process analysis uses an ordinary least squares or logistic regression-based path analytic framework to estimate direct and indirect affects in single and multiple mediator models (Hayes, 2009). Process modeling is undertaken when the goal is to understand, explore, and estimate the mechanism by which some presumed causal variable affects an outcome through at least one intermediary variable (Hayes & Preacher, 2013). Hayes and Preacher (2013) explained that conditional process analysis is used to estimate the direct and indirect pathways through which a variable transmits its effects. This method of analysis was chosen for this study due to it being a more efficient and easy way to determine mediating relationships rather than structural equation modeling, which was the method of analyzing mediating relationships before conditional process analysis was developed.

Procedure

This research study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at The University of Akron. A link was sent out to solicit for participants on Facebook webpages and university listservs. Upon clicking on the link for the study, the first thing participants were prompted to do was review the informed consent form. This consent form presented the purpose of the study, potential risks, confidentiality, as well as contact information for the researcher. All participants were required to review and sign this form in order to participate. Inclusion criteria for participants were that they
must be at least 18 years of age and have an adult sibling (who is 18 years of age or older). This information was provided on the informed consent form clearly and participants had to agree to this before proceeding. Participants were then instructed to select one adult sibling (at least 18 years of age or older) to use throughout the study, which will be referred to as the “referent sibling.” Following the instructions, the participants were led to the measures, each subscale offering its own set of instructions to ensure clarity for participants. After completing the measures, participants were asked to provide their demographic information. Lastly, participants will be debriefed and thanked for their participation and were able to enter into an option drawing to win one of two $25 Amazon gift cards. If participants chose to enter into the drawing, they were instructed to click a link that asked for their personal information in a separate survey that was not attached to their questionnaire.

Participants

Participants of this study had to be an adult (18 years of age or older) and had to have at least one sibling who is also an adult, 18 years of age or older. Participants were recruited through social media sites such as Facebook and listservs through local universities. This method of solicitation was used due to this being a convenience sample and the ease in collecting data from numerous participants across the country. This study asked the participants to state their age as well as the age of their sibling to whom they are referring throughout this study. This study aimed to have approximately 100 participants; however, the researcher was successful in obtaining 211 participants, 178 of whom provided complete and usable data. Research for correlational analysis indicates that this sample size is more than appropriate for this type of analysis (Knoke,
Bohmstedt, & Mee, 2002). Previous research on correlational studies indicates that a small correlation is just as good as a high correlation, and as small as a 10-person sample size can exhibit such relationships (Knoke et al., 2002). Prior research indicates that a study having a moderate amount of participants for mediation analysis yields more accurate results. A study conducted by Rucker, Preacher, Tormala, and Petty (2011) found that conclusions based on mediation analysis are dependent on sample size. This study found that moderate sample sizes are most likely optimal to demonstrate full mediation and that moderate sample sizes give the researcher enough power to detect the total effect (Rucker et al., 2011). Results from this study indicate that a sample size that is too small might be a challenge to demonstrating a total full effect and a sample size that is too large makes it difficult to rule out any additional layers of mediation (Rucker et al., 2011). Therefore, the sample size of 178 participants was more than sufficient for the type of statistical analyses used.

Other demographic information this study collected included the age of the participant and their referent sibling, the gender of the participant and their referent sibling, if the referent sibling is alive or deceased, marital status or involvement in a significant relationship for the participant and their referent sibling, race/ethnicity, and household income.

**Instruments**

The Relational Ethics Scale (RES), the Family Forgiveness Scale (FFS), and the Relational Assessment Scale (RAS) were used to gather data in the study.
Relational Ethics Scale (RES)

Relational ethics was measured utilizing Hargrave and Colleague’s Relational Ethics Scale (1991). The Relational Ethics Scale (RES) is a self-report scale that is designed to measure the emotions that exist in one’s family in which they were raised (vertical relationships) as well as measuring the emotions that exist in one’s primary relationship (horizontal relationship) (Hargrave et al., 1991). A five-stage procedure was used for developing the Relational Ethics Scale (Hargrave et al., 1991). In the first stage, definitions were developed for relational ethics and other related constructs (Hargrave et al., 1991). Possible constructs of the relational ethics dimension were identified by reviewing writings of Boszormenyi-Nagy; definitions that are present in the literature; and examples of the constructs as identified in case examples (Hargrave et al., 1991).

In the second stage, statements were created for the use in the Relational Ethics Scale (RES) by authors of the scale which reflected the various content of relational ethics according to the definitions developed in stage one (Hargrave et al., 1991).

In the third stage, an expert panel was used in order to test the statements created in Stage 2 and administered to 290 volunteer subjects (Hargrave et al., 1991). In this stage item analysis was found for both vertical and horizontal items at a significant level (p < .05) (Hargrave et al., 1991). A factor analysis was conducted and revealed three factors and 22 of the horizontal statements and three factors for vertical statements, all of which loaded at or above the .40 level (Hargrave et al. 1991). The following six factors were named as follows: vertical trust and justice, vertical loyalty, vertical entitlement, horizontal trust and justice, horizontal loyalty, and horizontal entitlement (Hargrave et
The analysis indicated that the statements pertaining to vertical and horizontal trust and justice loaded on those factors at the highest level (Hargrave et al., 1991). A Cronbach’s alpha analysis was conducted on each set of horizontal and vertical statements, which was between .93 and .96 and the total set of statements, which was computed at .96 (Hargrave et al., 1991). A Pearson correlation coefficient was performed on the data of the horizontal and vertical statements and revealed a .54 correlation (p < .001).

In the fourth stage, a revised version of the Relational Ethics Scale based on the results from the preliminary study in stage three was tested with another sample of participants in order to determine predictive validity (Hargrave et al., 1991). The null hypothesis of this stage was that there would be no significant differences between the Relational Ethics Scale scores on functional, well-adjusted individuals and dysfunctional, maladjusted individuals (Hargrave et al., 1991). The 24-item Relational Ethics Scale was given to 80 volunteer subjects who were identified by three marriage and family therapists (two with master’s degrees and one with a doctorate degree) who identified clients who displayed either dysfunctional or well-adjusted family relationships and were willing to participate in the study (Hargrave et al., 1991). These members were divided into two groups: 41 representing a group displaying dysfunctional family relationships and 39 participants displaying well-adjusted family relationships and consisted of 54 females and 26 males (Hargrave et al., 1991). Participants were asked to respond on a 5-point Likert scale, which ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree (Hargrave et al., 1991). Two-tailed t-tests were conducted for both the dysfunctional and the well-adjusted groups on total scores of the Relational
Ethics Scale as well as for scores on each of the separate constructs (Hargrave et al., 1991). The scores on the Relational Ethics Scale as a whole as well as the sets of vertical and horizontal statements and the six constructs revealed a significant relationship between the two groups (Hargrave et al., 1991).

During the fifth stage, the Relational Ethics Scale was correlated with the Dyadic Adjustment Scale and the Personal Authority in the Family System questionnaire using the scores of sample number of participants, in order to follow accepted psychometric procedures in developing a new scale and to provide concurrent validity (Hargrave et al., 1991). Moderate correlations were found between the Relational Ethics Scale and the intergenerational subscale of the Personal Authority scale (Hargrave et al., 1991). The horizontal subscales, with the exception of Horizontal Entitlement, correlated with the subscales of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale at the expected high level (Hargrave et al., 1991).

For the purpose of this study, vertical scale items measuring family of origin and parent-child relationships was removed and horizontal scale items were modified to illustrate wording for adult sibling relationships. In a previous study conducted by Chambliss and colleagues (1992), this modification was used and this study did not report any issues with reliability. The researcher contacted the lead researcher Chambliss and received permission via email to use this modification as used in the 1992 study.

**Family Forgiveness Scale (FFS)**

The Family Forgiveness Scale was developed in order to provide a reliable and valid measure of forgiveness in the family, as reported by a member of that family (Pollard et al., 1998). The primary assumption was that a scale could be designed to
measure forgiveness abilities, as perceived by an individual, concerning both the family of origin and the current primary relationship (Pollard et al., 1998). Based on previous literature on forgiveness, five constructs were selected for this scale (Pollard et al., 1998). The five constructs utilized in this scale are defined by Pollard and colleagues (1998) as follows:

- **Realization**: the intrapsychic awareness, in either the offender or offended, of an incident which caused pain and suffering;
- **Recognition**: an assessment of the painful incident by either the offender or the offended;
- **Reparation**: three interactional elements; first, confrontation about the painful incident, second, admission of responsibility by the offender, and third, reciprocal asking for and giving forgiveness;
- **Restitution**: making of amends by offender;
- **Resolution**: relinquishment of past hurts by both the offended and the offender. (pp. 96-97)

A four-step procedure was used to develop the scale, which include (a) development of constructs and definitions, (b) statement formation, (c) testing the preliminary scale, and (d) correlation with two other scales (Pollard et al., 1998).

In step one, constructs and their definitions were developed by a review of the current literature on forgiveness (Pollard et al., 1998). A panel of four experienced clinicians who held doctorates in the field of counseling were chosen to evaluate and establish the initial definitions for the five constructs (realization, recognition, reparation, restitution, and resolution). The panel was asked to rate the constructs and their definitions for construct validity (Pollard et al., 1998).

In step two, a second panel of six raters was used, all of which held doctorate degrees in the counseling field and were knowledgeable of using forgiveness in therapeutic practice (Pollard et al., 1998). The raters evaluated items on the preliminary FFS for face validity and statements were developed as potential measurements for the
constructs (Pollard et al., 1998). Selected statements were chosen for the preliminary FFS based on consistency and frequency. A statement was deemed consistent if it was rated a four or higher by more than one rater on a 5-point Likert scale (Pollard et al., 1998). Frequency requirements were considered reputable if a statement received at least 80% or more of the total possible points by combined ratings (Pollard et al., 1998). The Kendall Coefficient of Concordance was performed on the resulting data to assess interrater reliability, the results were statistically significant at the 0.001 level (Pollard et al., 1998). Therefore, content and construct validity were found as well as inter-rater agreement was 80% or higher on the items (Pollard et al., 1998).

The purpose of step three was to test the statements validated by the six panel of experts (Pollard et al., 1998). The scale used for this step was a self-reporting measure using a 5-point Likert scale that included items that emerged through the two initial steps of the scale development (Pollard et al., 1998). The scale had two sections: the first section related to the family of origin and the second section dealt with the person’s primary relationship, such as their most significant current peer relationship (Pollard et al., 1998). A sample of 342 individuals (113 males and 229 females, ranging in age from 21 to 66 years old) were used to measure the 56 statements on the preliminary scale (Pollard et al., 1998). All of the participants were no longer living with their family of origin. During step three, item validity was found by measuring several principle component analyses in addition to canonical correlations to assess the correlations within the identified constructs which resulted in five emerging factors in the family of origin scale (Pollard et al., 1998). Lastly, a two-tailed MANOVA was performed to assess correlations between the two sections of the instrument (Pollard et al., 1998). In the
family of origin section, a factor analysis was utilized and five factors were extracted using an oblique pattern matrix (Pollard et al., 1998). In the primary relationship section, six factors were found, also using an oblique pattern matrix (Pollard et al., 1998). Lastly, an additional examination of the factors was implemented using a varimax rotation on both sections of the preliminary scale and this analysis suggested that both sections of the FFS use the original five constructs (Pollard et al., 1998). In summary, through the use of factor analysis, canonical correlations and reliability coefficients, 40 statements were identified to have factoral validity and these items were assessed using 342 individuals’ responses on items in the preliminary FFS (Pollard et al., 1998).

Step four’s purpose was to determine the concurrent validity of the FFS and to strengthen the construct and content validity of the scale (Pollard et al., 1998). Fifty participants were used in this final step, which included 7 family therapists with at least 10 years’ clinical experience who nominated 25 individuals whom identified as high in forgiveness abilities and 25 individuals whom they identified as low in forgiveness abilities (Pollard et al., 1998). For this step, forgiveness ability was defined as, “the capacity to work through forgiveness difficulties in their present and past family relationships” (Pollard et al., 1998, p. 101). The 50 subjects included 18 males and 32 females aged 21 years and older, all Caucasian and all reported as financially independent (Pollard et al., 1998).

The Worthington Autonomy Scale (WAS) measured self-perceived levels of personal autonomy; a characteristic that the author’s deemed is involved in forgiveness (Pollard et al., 1998). The Relational Ethics Scale (RES) measures self-perceived levels
of fairness and justice in the family system, both in one’s family of origin and in one’s current adult significant relationship (Pollard et al., 1998). The authors felt that, since there is a connection between levels of fairness/justice and issues of forgiveness, the RES was included for concurrent validity comparisons with the family of origin scale (Pollard et al., 1998). Both of these scales were factor analyzed and were deemed to be both reliable and valid (Pollard et al., 1998).

The means of the Family Forgiveness Scale (FFS), the relational ethics scale (RES) and the Worthington autonomy scale (WAS) were compared (Pollard et al., 1998). The internal consistency of the total FFS and subscales in each section of the instrumented were analyzed using Cronbach’s coefficient alpha, 0.93 was found for the Family Forgiveness Scale (FFS) which placed the scale in high range of internal consistency (Pollard et al., 1998). Concurrent validity was supported for the FFS as well (Pollard et al., 1998). A Pearson’s correlation was performed on the subscales of the FFS, the subscales of the RES, and the subscales of the WAS, (Pollard et al., 1998). Results indicated convergent validity (Pollard et al., 1998).

Based on the data from the sample of 342 participants, the statements in the family forgiveness scale showed significant item validity as well as significant concurrent validity (Pollard et al., 1998). The FFS, RES, and the WAS illustrated significant discriminating ability and data from the sample also showed that the scale has significant construct validity (Pollard et al., 1998). The reliability of the items and each subscale was found to be in the high range, with the total alpha for the FFS as 0.93 (Pollard et al., 1998). The internal consistency for the subscales of both sections of the FFS were statistically significant, with alphas of 0.94 on the family origin section and
0.92 on the peer relationship section (Pollard et al., 1998). Canonical correlations between subscales on the FFS, RES, and WAS established convergent validity for the FFS (Pollard et al., 1998).

For the purpose of this study, the family of origin section of the scale was not used and the primary relationship section was used with a modification in the instructions, asking that the participant refer to their referent sibling when answering the questions. This modification has not been used previously and this researcher attempted to request permission to modify the instructions of the subscale. Since the primary and subsequent investigators were unable to be reached, this modification was used and no issues were found with the reliability of the scale with the modification in the instructions.

**Relational Assessment Scale**

The Relational Assessment Scale (RAS-7) is a self-report scale created by Hendrick (1988) consisting of seven Semantic Differential items in which responses ranged from 1, “low satisfaction” to 5 “high satisfaction.” Hendrick (1988) created this scale to examine relational satisfaction in intimate partner relationships. Hendrick reported reliability estimates across several studies to be within the range of alpha 0.73 to 0.93. For the present study, the term “partner” will be altered to “sibling” to measure the relational satisfaction among sibling relationships and to maintain uniformity throughout the other measures used. This modification was used by this researcher in a previous study investigating adult sibling relationships, and found the RSS applying to sibling relationships to have an alpha of .087 (Apel, 2009).
Hypotheses

The following section will review this study’s hypotheses. Boszormenyi-Nagy’s Contextual Family Theory and Hargrave’s (1991) Relational Ethics Scale (RES) will be used as the theoretical framework to examine the hypotheses. This study will examine relational ethics and forgiveness in adult sibling relationships, the relationship between relational satisfaction and adult sibling forgiveness, the relationship between relational ethics and satisfaction in adult sibling relationships, and if relational satisfaction mediates the relationship between relational ethics and adult sibling forgiveness. The hypotheses for this study are as follows:

1. Higher levels of relational ethics in sibling relationships are positively and significantly correlated with higher levels of forgiveness. This hypothesis will be measured using Hargrave’s (1991) Relational Ethics Scale (RES) and Pollard and Colleagues (1998) Family Forgiveness Scale (FFS).

2. Relational satisfaction in sibling relationships is significantly and positively correlated with forgiveness in sibling relationships. This hypothesis will be measured by using Hendrick’s (1998) Relational Assessment Scale (RAS) and the FFS (Pollard, et al., 1998).

3. Relational ethics in sibling relationships is significantly and positively correlated with relational satisfaction in adult sibling relationships. This hypothesis will be measured using the RES (Hargrave, 1991) and RAS (Hendrick, 1988).

4. Relational satisfaction mediates the relationship between relational ethics and sibling forgiveness, such that higher levels relational ethics will lead to higher levels of relational satisfaction, which would in turn lead to higher levels of forgiveness. This
hypothesis will use the RES (Hargrave, 1991), RAS (Hendrick, 1998), and the FFS (Pollard, et al., 1998) to test the mediating relationship among the variables.

**Statistical Analyses**

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used in this research study. Descriptive statistics refers to means, standard deviations, frequencies, reliability coefficients, and correlations for the data set variables. For Hypotheses 1 through 3, a Pearson’s bivariate correlation was used to measure the relationship among the variables. A Conditional Process analysis (Hayes, 2009) was used to investigate the fourth hypotheses, which looked at a mediating relationship among the variables of relational satisfaction, relational ethics, and forgiveness.

**Summary**

The statement of the problem, research design and procedures and data collection process were described in this chapter. The selection of participants and the basic demographics of participants, and the descriptions of the instruments were discussed in detail. This chapter also explained the research methodology and statistical analyses that was used to address the research questions and hypotheses. Previous research has not investigated the relationship between forgiveness, relational ethics, and relational satisfaction in adult sibling relationships. Therefore, this study was able to provide much needed information into the uniqueness of adult sibling relationships and some understanding of these variables that impact this relationship.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between relational ethics, forgiveness, and relational satisfaction in adult sibling relationships. A survey design was used to examine the relationship between the variables. Specifically, correlational analyses were used to investigate the relationship between relational ethics and adult sibling relationships, the relationship between relational satisfaction and adult sibling forgiveness, and the relationship between relational ethics and satisfaction in adult sibling relationships. Lastly, a conditional process analysis was conducted to investigate if relational satisfaction mediates the relationship between relational ethics and adult sibling forgiveness. In this chapter a description of the sample is presented followed by the results of the hypotheses and a brief discussion about the findings.

Response Rate

As discussed in the previous chapter, this study utilized a survey research design. Using Qualtrics, a web-based software program that is designed to create surveys or polls was utilized. A link to the study with a brief description was posted online on social media websites, such as Facebook and professional counseling webpages, and through university listservs. The following section will discuss in more detail data cleaning and data screening and a description of the sample that was used in the study.
Data Cleaning

Data cleaning, which is defined as a two-step process including detection and then correction, is done to eliminate errors in a data set (Mason, Gillenwater, Pugh, Kenefik, Collins, Whitaker, & Volk). Mason and colleagues discuss how, unless the data set is small (less than 100 subjects), data cleaning is done in several stages. Once a clean dataset is achieved, the process of analyzing the data can be done. The following section will discuss in detail the steps taken to screen the data, clean the data, and remove and/or replace missing data for the data set before analyzing the data.

Missing Data

A total of 211 responses were collected. Of the 211 responses, 178 respondents were used for the final data set, either due to significant missing data (20% or more) (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007) or not completing the survey. Data revealed missing items in both Relational Ethics Scale (RES) and the Family Forgiveness Scale (FFS). Missing items were replaced using the participant means of each subscale under the assumption that items were missing at random. Each column of the data set was investigated looking each of the total scores and subscales individually. Each column that had a blank indicated a missing item. A participant case mean for that scale was used to replace the missing data by calculating the mean for the scales or subscales and that score was used for the analyses. Each subscale was manually scrolled through to determine how many items are missing for that subscale. For participants who showed missing data where 20% of the items were missing for any of the scales, these members were excluded in the analysis and removed. A total of 33 participants (16%) were
removed due to missing data. This includes individuals who did not complete the questionnaires or skipped multiple questions.

**Data Screening**

The process of screening data is to assess the data for normality (skewness and/or kurtosis), univariate or multivariate outliers, and multicollinearity (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). For investigating both skewness and kurtosis, this was screened by dividing the appropriate skew or kurtosis statistic for each scale by its standard error. If the absolute answer is greater than 3.29 (p < .001 for the z distribution), then the response is thought to be either skewed or kurtotic (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). For the Relational Ethics Scale (RES), data screening as well as visually referring to a histogram revealed that this scale does not show to be skewed (-1.97) or kurtotic (-1.27). For the Relational Assessment Scale (RAS), data screening revealed slight skewness (-3.42) but no kurtosis (-.77). In order to correct for the skewness, data transforming occurred. For the negatively skewed distribution, a square root transformation was done in order to reverse the skewness (1.92). Lastly, for the Family Forgiveness Scale (FFS), data screening and viewing the histogram illustrated that this scale is not skewed (1.94) or kurtotic (2.12).

An analysis for univariate and multivariate outliers was done. A univariate outlier is a data point that contains an extreme value on one variable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). A multivariate outlier is a combination of unusual scores on at least two variables. Both univariate and multivariate outliers can influence the outcome of the statistical analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). First, univariate outliers were analyzed by examining the z scores. A z-scores that is greater than 3.29 are considered to be
outliers (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). No univariate outliers were found in the data set. Multivariate outliers were assessed by using Mahalonobis distance (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). A chi-square analysis was also done to examine outliers. No multivariate outliers were found in the data set. Lastly, multicollinearity was examined through a tolerance test, VIF, and a collinearity diagnostics and a bivariate correlation. Multicollinearity is described as two or more variables or scales being highly correlated (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Results indicated no multicollinearity issues through the tolerance and the VIF tests (see Table 1); however, results indicated concerns for multicollinearity through the condition index test for two of the scales. Results from these tests indicate that the Relational Ethics Scale and the Family Forgiveness Scale show to have potential multicollinearity as indicated in the condition index (Condition index = 33.467; Proportion variance, RES = .57 and FFS = .74). Interpretations for multicollinearity should be examined by all three tests; therefore, since only one test came back with potential multicollinearity, this can be interpreted as acceptable since there aren't any in which all three agree that there are problems (see Table 1). A discussion about the limitations to the results due to the potential of multicollinearity of these two scales will be discussed in Chapter V.

Sample Descriptions

A total of 178 individuals comprised the total sample. Out of this sample, 11.8% were male (N = 21) and 87.1% were female (N = 155). When asked the referent sibling’s sex that was used for this study, 41.2% (N = 43) were reported as male and 58.8% (N = 104) were reported as female. Most of the sample identified as Non-
Hispanic White (85%), followed by other (7%), Black or African American (4%), Hispanic-Latino (2%), Asian American (2%), and American-Indian or Alaska Native (1%). Individuals in the sample ranged in age from 22 years old to 77 years old and the referent sibling age range from 18 years old to 76 years old. About half of the sample reported being married (55.6%), .6% being widowed, 6.2% being divorced, 18.6% never being married, and 18.6% as being in an unmarried relationship. Participants report that their sibling’s marital status include almost half of their siblings as married (45.8%), 17% widowed, 7.3% divorced, 1.1% separated, 27.5% as never being married, and 16.4% as being a member of an unmarried relationship. Participants in the study reported that their yearly household income was under $25,000 for 12%, $25,000-$39,000 for 15.4%, $40,000 to $49,000 for 12%, $50,000 to $74,000 for 16% $75,000 to $99,000 for 17.7% and more than $100,000 for 26.9%. When asked if the referent sibling that was used throughout this study is still alive, most of the participants responded yes (98.9%). Participants were asked to report how often they are in contact
with the referent sibling, in which they responded as daily (23%), one time a week (37.9%), one time a month (29.9%), one time a year (5.65%) and never (3.4%).

**Correlations**

Pearson correlations were estimated using SPSS to test Hypothesis 1, which stated: “Higher levels of relational ethics in sibling relationships are positively and significantly correlated with higher levels of forgiveness.” Table 2 shows the correlation between RES and FFS total scores. Results show a high negative correlation ($r = -0.783, p < .01$). Results indicate that higher levels of relational ethics in sibling relationships are negatively and significantly correlated with higher levels of forgiveness, which is not in support of Hypothesis 1.

A Pearson correlation was used to test Hypothesis 2, which stated: “Relational satisfaction in sibling relationships is significantly and positively correlated with forgiveness in sibling relationships.” Table 2 shows the correlation between RAS and FFS total scores. Results revealed a significant negative correlation ($r = -0.773, p < 0.01$). Results implied that higher levels of relational satisfaction in the sibling relationship are significantly and negatively correlated with sibling forgiveness, which is not in support of Hypothesis 2.

A Pearson correlation was used to test Hypothesis 3, which stated: “Relational ethics in sibling relationships is significantly and positively correlated with relational satisfaction in adult sibling relationships.” Table 2 shows the correlation between RES and RAS total scores. Results indicate a significant and positive correlation ($r = .853, p < 0.01$). Results support Hypothesis 3, which suggest that higher levels of relational ethics in sibling relationships are significantly and positively correlated with relational
satisfaction in sibling relationships. Table 2 provides a correlational table for the above hypotheses.

Table 2. Correlations examining the relation of the Relational Ethics Scale (RES) to Family Forgiveness (FFS), and Relational Satisfaction (RAS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Relational Ethics</th>
<th>Family Forgiveness</th>
<th>Relational Satisfaction</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relational Ethics</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>44.47</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(8.46)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Forgiveness</td>
<td>-.783**</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>39.03</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(10.39)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Satisfaction</td>
<td>.853**</td>
<td>-.773**</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>25.64</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(6.62)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 178. GH = General Hardiness. Analyses used were Pearson’s r, and are significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed). *p ≤ .05, **p ≤ .01.*

**Conditional Process Analysis**

A conditional process analysis was used to investigate Hypothesis 4, which stated: “Relational satisfaction mediates the relationship between relational ethics and sibling forgiveness, such that higher levels of relational ethics will lead to higher levels of relational satisfaction, which would in turn lead to higher levels of forgiveness.” Figure 1 shows the mediation between the RES, RAS, and FFS. Conditional process analysis examines the relationship among the variables through three paths: A, which examines the X variable (independent variable; relational ethics) in predicting the M (mediating; relational satisfaction) variable; path B, which examines the X variable (independent variable; relational ethics) and the M variable (mediating variable;
relational satisfaction) together in predicting the Y variable (dependent variable; sibling forgiveness); and path C, which looks at the X variable (independent variable; relational ethics) predicting the Y variable (dependent variable; sibling forgiveness) (Hayes & Preacher, 2013).

Path A tested to see if the X variable relational ethics predicts the M variable Relational satisfaction. Results show that the X variable (relational ethics) changed with the M variable (relational satisfaction) in the equation ($\beta = .07(.00), p < .001$). These results indicate that there is a relationship between relational ethics and relational satisfaction, meaning that the X variable of relational ethics predicts the M variable of relational satisfaction. Path B investigated the variables of the M variable, relational satisfaction, in predicting Y, adult sibling forgiveness. Results indicated that the M variable, relational satisfaction does predict the Y variable, adult sibling forgiveness. Lastly, Path C tested the X variable (relational ethics) to see if it predicted Y (adult sibling forgiveness). Results indicate that the X variable of relational ethics has an impact on Y ($\beta = .096(.06)$. Therefore, results suggest that a significant mediating relationship exists, which indicates that higher levels of relational ethics increases relationship satisfaction, which in turn increases forgiveness in adult sibling relationships ($\beta = -.96, SE = .06, p < 0.01$).

Summary

This chapter briefly reviewed the purpose of the study and the methods used to obtain the results. A discussion about each of the hypotheses and methods used to acquire the results was discussed and tables illustrating the results were presented. The results described in this chapter can be summarized as follows:
Hypothesis 1: Higher levels of relational ethics in sibling relationships are positively and significantly correlated with higher levels of forgiveness. This hypothesis was found to have a significant negative correlation, which was not in support of Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2: Relational satisfaction in sibling relationships is significantly and positively correlated with forgiveness in sibling relationships. Results indicate a significant negative correlated. The results were also not in support of Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3: Relational ethics in sibling relationships is significantly and positively correlated with relational satisfaction in adult sibling relationships.
This hypothesis was found to be significantly and positively correlated, which was in support of Hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis 4: Relational satisfaction mediates the relationship between relational ethics and sibling forgiveness, such that higher levels of relational ethics will lead to higher levels of relational satisfaction, which would in turn lead to higher levels of forgiveness. This hypothesis was found to show a significant mediating relationship, which is in support of Hypothesis 4.

Chapter V will provide a discussion and limitations to these results. It will also provide a discussion of these findings and address the limitations of the study and provide suggestions for future research on adult sibling relationships.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate adult sibling relationships, specifically in regards to relational ethics, relational satisfaction, and the use of forgiveness in sibling relationships. As described in the literature review, minimal to no research has examined the adult sibling relationship in the field of Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT). Previous research has investigated relational ethics in other relationships, such as intimate partner relationships and parent-child relationships; however, no research to date has investigated relational ethics in the adult sibling relationship. Forgiveness in couple relationships has been examined in the field of MFT; however, a thorough literature search has shown that forgiveness in adult sibling relationships has only been investigated one time, and it was by this researcher in a previous study. This study aids relevant and necessary research to the field of MFT, as majority of the research investigates parent child and couple relationships.

Overall, results of this study show that a significant negative relationship exists between the variables of relational ethics and forgiveness, as well as the relational satisfaction and sibling forgiveness. Results indicated a significantly positive relationship between relational ethics and relational satisfaction in adult sibling relationships. Lastly, a significant mediating relationship was found, stating that relational satisfaction mediates the relationship between relational ethics and sibling
forgiveness, such that higher levels of relational ethics lead to higher levels of relational satisfaction, which in turn lead to higher levels of forgiveness. The chapter will discuss in more detail the results of the hypotheses in this study, the implications of the results, limitations to the study, and implications of these results both clinically and future research. Lastly, a summary and conclusion will be provided.

**Relational Ethics and Forgiveness in Adult Sibling Relationships**

Hypothesis 1 proposed that higher levels of relational ethics in sibling relationships are positively and significantly correlated with higher levels of forgiveness. This hypothesis was not supported as the results indicated that higher levels of relational ethics were significantly and negatively correlated with higher levels of forgiveness. An interpretation of these results could indicate that forgiveness is not needed in relationships that have high levels of relational ethics. Another interpretation could be that sibling relationships with high levels of relational ethics experience less conflict in which forgiveness is needed. Originally, it was hypothesized that relational ethics in sibling relationships would increase the use of forgiveness; however, it is not surprising that siblings who report high levels of relational ethics may experience less conflict where forgiveness would be needed. Although the original hypothesis was not supported, these results provide important information in understanding sibling relationships. How future studies could continue to investigate forgiveness will be discussed in the future research section of this chapter.

**Relational Satisfaction and Forgiveness in Adult Sibling Relationships**

Hypothesis 2 proposed that relational satisfaction in sibling relationships is significantly and positively correlated with forgiveness in sibling relationships. This
hypothesis was not supported, as results indicated that higher levels of relational satisfaction were significantly and negatively correlated with higher levels of forgiveness. This could mean that sibling relationships in which have higher levels of relational satisfaction may experience less conflict or instances that call for sibling forgiveness to be used. The researcher initially hypothesized that higher levels of relational satisfaction would increase the use of forgiveness in sibling relationships when conflict occurs. The results may imply that siblings who report more relational satisfaction report less use of forgiveness in their relationship. Even though the hypothesis was not supported, the results might imply that siblings who feel satisfied in their relationship may experience fewer instances in which forgiveness is needed. A discussion about how these two results can be further investigated will be discussed in the future research.

**Relational Ethics and Relational Satisfaction in Sibling Relationships**

Hypothesis 3 posited that relational ethics in sibling relationships is significantly and positively correlated with relational satisfaction in adult sibling relationships. Results demonstrated a significant and positive relationship between relational ethics and relational satisfaction in sibling relationships. These results were in support of the hypothesis in that a relationship exists between higher levels of relational ethics and higher levels of relational satisfaction. Although causation cannot be determined due to a correlational analysis, it can be inferred that a relationship exists between relational ethics and relational satisfaction in sibling relationships. Future research could examine the causal relationship between these two variables. This will be further discussed in the research section of this chapter.
The Effects of Relational Satisfaction in Mediating the Relationship of Relational Ethics and Adult Sibling Forgiveness

Lastly, Hypothesis 4 proposed that relational satisfaction mediated the relationship between relational ethics and sibling forgiveness, such that higher levels of relational ethics will lead to higher levels of relational satisfaction, which in turn would lead to higher levels of forgiveness. A mediating relationship was found to be significant for the variables. Specifically, a significant relationship was found between relational ethics and relational satisfaction, as well as relational ethics and forgiveness. Results indicate that relational satisfaction mediates the relationships between relational ethics, in that, higher levels of relational ethics leads to higher levels of relational satisfaction, which results in higher levels of forgiveness. These results are in support of Hypothesis 4. These results provide important information in sibling relationships. These results indicate that relational ethics provides a foundation for increased satisfaction in sibling relationships. These results also indicate that relationship satisfaction plays a role in the relationship between the variables of relational ethics and forgiveness, such that the more relational satisfaction that exists in a sibling relationship will mediate the relationship of relational ethics and forgiveness. The future research section of this chapter will suggest the investigation of other variables and how they may be related to sibling forgiveness and how this information can be helpful for family therapists who are working with the sibling subsystem.
Research and Clinical Implications

There is minimal available research on adult sibling relationships and majority of the research discussing sibling relationships investigates sibling relationships through childhood or as siblings get older, such as in care-taking of parents (Campion-Barr & Killoren, 2015). Lewis (2015) has published clinical books on sibling relationships and how understanding this relationship in depth can aid in navigating other relationships in an individual’s life. Although Lewis’ (2015) book provides interesting insights into sibling relationships clinically, it is not based on research but rather her personal clinical experience. This present study offers some of the only research on adult sibling relationships in the field of MFT. In particular, it discusses the relationship between relational ethics, forgiveness and relational satisfaction in adult sibling relationships. This study can be considered an exploratory investigation of these constructs since little to no available research examines adult sibling relationships. This research provides a good start to understanding how adult sibling relationships are impacted by relational ethics, relational satisfaction, and forgiveness. Future studies should continue to examine this topic more in depth and with greater detail.

This study has some clinical implications that are worth noting. First this study was grounded in the Contextual Theory model. Contextual Theory is a systems theory that focuses on the importance of the individual within a family system (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1987; Gangamma, 2008). The Contextual Theory’s most compelling dimension, relational ethics, is considered to be the component that can be change producing and can be used as a clinical intervention. Contextual Theory focuses on increasing accountability and how this affects relationships the individual experiences (Gangamma,

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Understanding relational ethics and how this affects adult sibling relationships can be helpful in practice when working with individuals experiencing conflict or issues in their adult sibling relationship. Clinicians working with this population can use the RES as an instrument to measure a sibling subsystem or an individual’s level of relational ethics in the sibling relationship. Relational ethics can also be used as an intervention in counseling where an individual is challenged to take more personal accountability in their sibling relationship and is challenged to understand how their behavior is impactful on their family member(s) (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1987; Grames, et al., 2008). Using the relational ethics scale and the Contextual Theory in practice can aid in enhancing relational ethics in sibling relationships, as well as providing assistance in facilitating forgiveness. These clinical implications can be helpful in assisting therapists who are working with sibling relationships or sibling conflict as the presenting concern.

Forgiveness is a topic that has been examined in almost every relationship and has shown to be a strong intervention when used clinically (Hill, 2001; 2010; Wade & Worthington, 2005). When facilitating forgiveness clinically, past research using the Family Forgiveness Scale suggested four areas to assess and then to work through clinically:

(1) Enhancing realization, which refers to the intrapsychic awareness for the offender to the offended; (2) recognition, which refers to an assessment of the incident that caused pain for either the offender or the offended; (3) reparation, which includes confrontation of the incident that caused pain, admitting responsibility, and the reciprocal act of asking for and giving forgiveness; (4) restitution, which refers to making amends by the offender; and (5) resolution, which indicates relinquishment of previous hurts by the offender and the offended (Pollard, et al., 1998, pp. 96-97).
This Family Forgiveness Scale can be used in clinical practice when working with adult sibling subsystems or individuals experiencing adult sibling conflict to assess their levels of realization, recognition, reparation, restitution, and resolution, as well as identifying areas to work through in counseling.

Relational Satisfaction has been linked to forgiveness in previous studies (e.g. Apel, 2009; Fincham, 2000; Fincham et al., 2006; Gordon & Baucom, 2003; Kahadourian, et al., 2004). This study illustrated how a relationship exists between relational satisfaction and relational ethics, as well as relational satisfaction and forgiveness. Clinical implications for these results include assessing relational satisfaction when working with the adult sibling subsystem as well as individuals experiencing conflict in their adult sibling relationship. In addition to using interventions that could enhance relational satisfaction in adult sibling relationships, such as introducing more effective communication skills, increased empathy, and working through past hurt (forgiveness) (Apel, 2009; Fincham, et al., 2006; Paleari, et al., 2003; Knafo, et al., 2008; Pollard, et al., 1998).

**Limitations of the Current Study**

The present study had several limitations. The following section will discuss the limitations of the study, specifically, limitations in the chosen sampling technique, limitations in the chosen measures, and the limitations in regards to the limited available research on adult sibling forgiveness. This section will be followed by a discussion of future research to address some of these limitations.
Sampling Technique

A survey research design using a non-probability convenience sample was used to examine the relationship among the variables in this study. A discussion of the benefits of using this sampling and research design method was discussed in Chapter III. A convenience sample was selected due to the ease and availability of collecting data on many participants in a short amount of time. In addition, this method was selected due to only having inclusion requirements for the participants to be 18 years of age or older and having at least one adult sibling. Limitations of this sampling technique include the degree of generalizability of the results to the population and the unequal distribution among the gender of the participants, where more than three-quarters of the participants were female (please refer to Chapter IV on reporting of the demographics). In addition, the survey was advertised on social media webpages and listservs through universities that included counseling and therapy related fields; therefore, there may be an overrepresentation of members who are in the profession, which may impact the generalizability of the results to the general population.

Measures Used

The Relational Assessment Scale (RAS) data screening revealed a slight negative skewness. In order to correct for this, a data transformation occurred. A square root transformation was done in order to reverse the negative skewness (please review Chapter IV for more detail). It should be noted that even though this was corrected through a data transformation, interpretations should be taken with caution due to the slight skewness of this scale.
For the Relational Ethics Scale (RES) and for the Family Forgiveness Scale (FFS), horizontal scale items were modified to illustrate wording for adult sibling relationships and the vertical scale items measuring family of origin were not used. No previous studies were found that only used one of the two scale items; therefore, this could potentially impact the results of the study. Validity for the horizontal scale items for the Relational Ethics Scale (RES) was $\alpha = 8.66$ and for the Family Forgiveness Scale (FFS) was $\alpha = .91$. Therefore, these scales were deemed to be reliable in the use of just one of the subscales as well as the modification from partner to sibling. Since previous research using these scales have not used one of the two subscales individually or have been used with a modification in the person of study, this could potentially impact the interpretation of the results. Future research in examining the use of these horizontal and vertical scales separately, as well as future research using these subscales with the sibling modification can increase the reliability and validity of the subscales.

**Sample Limitations**

Limitations of the sample include an unequal distribution among the gender of the participants, where 87.1% of the participants were female (please refer to Chapter IV for reporting of the demographics). In addition to the large amount of reported female participants, majority of the participants identified as non-Hispanic White (85%). This illustrates a potential limitation in the diversity of the sample and should be considered when generalizing the results of the study. Lastly, a limitation of the sample is the reported income. Approximately 27% of the participants reported a yearly income of over $100,000. This represented the largest percentage of reported income and the highest tier of income. This overrepresentation of individuals who earn a higher income
could be due to the researcher advertising the study on social media pages that professional therapists, counselors, psychologists, and social workers use, as well as through university listservs where professors were notified to participate. This limitation should be considered when interpreting results. Lastly, since participants were provided with an online link to complete the survey, this can also be a potential limitation.

**Lack of Prior Research on Topic**

As addressed in depth in Chapter II, very little to no previous research has investigated the adult sibling relationship, especially in the field of MFT. Sibling relationships have been identified as being one of the most important and long lasting relationships experienced by individuals (Deater-Deckard et al., 2002; Myers, 1998), so the contribution this study makes to the field of MFT is essential to start filling this gap. Due to no prior research on this topic, this can pose as a limitation in interpreting the results. The hypotheses formed in this study were not based on a plethora of prior studies, but rather, the researcher’s beliefs on the relationship between the variables based on her one past investigation of adult sibling relationships and the past research on the constructs separately (Apel, 2009; Scharf et al., 2005; Stewart et al., 2001; Stocker et al., 1997). Future studies are needed in order to better understand the results outlined in this study and to further investigate these constructs together, since so little research is available.

The previous section discussed in detail the limitations to the study. The following section will discuss directions for future research. This section will tie some of the limitations discussed above into future research objectives in order to better
understand adult sibling relationships. Following this section, a summary and a conclusion will be presented.

**Directions for Future Research**

Future research should consider using probability-sampling methods to increase the generalizability of the results. Future studies should consider using a non-convenience sample in order to increase generalizability and to ensure of having a more representative sample in regards to age, gender, ethnicity/race, and income. Although this study gathered almost more than double the proposed sample size of N = 100, future studies should consider a larger sample to increase the distribution of the above demographics to increase generalizability to the population.

Future research is needed on adult sibling relationships as a whole. As discussed throughout this entire study, minimal research is available on this family subsystem (Apel, 2009; Noller, 2005). Future studies that collect data on both siblings would provide valuable and important information in the study of adult sibling relationships. This can help in providing an understanding of the interactional process of forgiveness in sibling relationships, as well as being able to compare the relational ethics and satisfaction among both siblings.

Further examination of what variables increase the use of forgiveness in adult sibling relationships would provide valuable information both in research and clinical practice. Understanding if sibling relationships that experience more conflict use forgiveness more than sibling relationship that have higher relational ethics and relational satisfaction would be important, to understanding forgiveness in adult sibling relationships. A way to investigate this would be to include a conflict scale to measure
the amount and type of conflict that exists in this relationship. Future research on the topic should consider incorporating a tool to measure conflict in this subsystem.

Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this research study was to examine the appropriateness of the Contextual theory in understanding adult sibling relationships and forgiveness. The present study demonstrated how relational ethics and relational satisfaction are related to forgiveness in adult sibling relationships. The results of this study illustrate the relationship between relational ethics and forgiveness, relational satisfaction and forgiveness, relational ethics and relational satisfaction in sibling relationships. Overall, results from this study show that relational ethics and forgiveness are significantly and negatively correlated, relational satisfaction and forgiveness in sibling relationships are significantly and negatively correlated, and relational ethics and relational satisfaction in sibling relationships are significantly and positively correlated. A conditional process analysis illustrated that relational satisfaction mediates the relationship between relational ethics and forgiveness, such that, higher levels of relational ethics increases relational satisfaction, which in turn, increases the use of forgiveness in adult sibling relationships.

This study adds relevant and needed information on adult sibling relationships. Very little to no research is available on this topic in the field of MFT. This study adds pertinent findings by examining the role of forgiveness in adult sibling relationships through the Contextual Theory model. To the best of the researcher’s knowledge, this contribution marks the first published research that can be found on adult sibling relationships in the field of MFT. The researcher hopes that future research on this topic
will be investigated and this current study will be used as a springboard for future research investigating this long lasting and important familial relationship.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

THE ROLE OF RELATIONAL ETHICS AND FORGIVENESS IN
ADULT SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS

This survey is about adult sibling relationships and forgiveness. If you have no adult sibling, please pass this survey on to a friend or a family member who does. Please refer to the same sibling (the referent sibling) throughout this survey, as this study pertains to adult sibling relationships.

Instructions: Please rate the following statements as they apply to yourself and the referent sibling’s relationship. Please rate each question from 1 to 5, where (1) indicates strongly disagree and (5) strongly agree. CIRCLE ONE NUMBER FOR EACH ITEM.

1. I try to meet the emotional needs of this person
   1- Strongly Disagree
   2- Disagree
   3- Neutral
   4- Agree
   5- Strongly Agree

2. I do not trust this individual to look out for my best interests.
   1- Strongly Disagree
   2- Disagree
   3- Neutral
   4- Agree
   5- Strongly Agree

3. When I feel hurt, I say or do hurtful things to this person.
   1- Strongly Disagree
   2- Disagree
   3- Neutral
   4- Agree
   5- Strongly Agree
4. This person stands beside me in times of trouble or joy.
   1- Strongly Disagree
   2- Disagree
   3- Neutral
   4- Agree
   5- Strongly Agree

5. Before I make important decisions, I ask for the opinions of this person.
   1- Strongly Disagree
   2- Disagree
   3- Neutral
   4- Agree
   5- Strongly Agree

6. There is unequal contribution to the relationship between me and this individual.
   1- Strongly Disagree
   2- Disagree
   3- Neutral
   4- Agree
   5- Strongly Agree

7. When I feel angry, I tend to take it out on this person.
   1- Strongly Disagree
   2- Disagree
   3- Neutral
   4- Agree
   5- Strongly Agree

8. We are equal partners in this relationship.
   1- Strongly Disagree
   2- Disagree
   3- Neutral
   4- Agree
   5- Strongly Agree

9. We give of ourselves to benefit one another.
   1- Strongly Disagree
   2- Disagree
   3- Neutral
   4- Agree
   5- Strongly Agree
10. I take advantage of this individual.
   1- Strongly Disagree
   2- Disagree
   3- Neutral
   4- Agree
   5- Strongly Agree

11. I am taken for granted or used unfairly in this relationship.
   1- Strongly Disagree
   2- Disagree
   3- Neutral
   4- Agree
   5- Strongly Agree

12. This person listens to me and values my thoughts.
   1- Strongly Disagree
   2- Disagree
   3- Neutral
   4- Agree
   5- Strongly Agree
Instructions: Please indicate your level of satisfaction with your adult sibling in regards to the below questions. Please rate each question from 1 to 5, where (1) indicates low satisfaction and (5) indicates high satisfaction. CIRCLE ONE NUMBER FOR EACH ITEM.

13. How well does your sibling meet your needs?
1 2 3 4 5

14. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?
1 2 3 4 5

15. How good is your relationship compared to most?
1 2 3 4 5

16. How often do you wish you didn’t have this person as a sibling?
1 2 3 4 5

17. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?
1 2 3 4 5

18. How much do you love your sibling?
1 2 3 4 5

19. How many problems are there in your relationship?
1 2 3 4 5
Instructions: This scale is designed to measure forgiveness in families as reported by the individual in the family. Please mark the following statements as they relate to your referent sibling relationship. Please read the items and apply them to yourself and this relationship with your referent sibling. Rate each question on a scale from 4 to 1, where (4) is almost always true; (3) Often true; (2) is seldom true; (1) is never true. CIRCLE ONE NUMBER FOR EACH ITEM.

20. With this person I can allow myself to accept my feelings as my own.
   4- Almost always true
   3- Often true
   2- Seldom true
   1- Never true

21. We believe it is important to understand when we have hurt each other.
   4- Almost always true
   3- Often true
   2- Seldom true
   1- Never true

22. We believe that love means never having to say you are sorry.
   4- Almost always true
   3- Often true
   2- Seldom true
   1- Never true

23. It is hard for me to accept an apology from this person.
   4- Almost always true
   3- Often true
   2- Seldom true
   1- Never true

24. I trust this person to accept my apology and put wrong aside.
   4- Almost always true
   3- Often true
   2- Seldom true
   1- Never true

25. Most of the time we avoid confrontation because we don’t want to hurt each other.
   4- Almost always true
   3- Often true
   2- Seldom true
   1- Never true
26. This individual never understands my feelings when they have offended me.
   4- Almost always true
   3- Often true
   2- Seldom true
   1- Never true

27. I believe it is important to ask for forgiveness when I hurt this person.
   4- Almost always true
   3- Often true
   2- Seldom true
   1- Never true

28. We like to work things out between us.
   4- Almost always true
   3- Often true
   2- Seldom true
   1- Never true

29. I feel like I am always walking on eggshells after I have apologized.
   4- Almost always true
   3- Often true
   2- Seldom true
   1- Never true

30. I am usually aware when I have been hurtful toward this person.
   4- Almost always true
   3- Often true
   2- Seldom true
   1- Never true

31. I don’t think anyone can really understand the pain they have caused someone.
   4- Almost always true
   3- Often true
   2- Seldom true
   1- Never true

32. I think admitting fault is a sign of weakness.
   4- Almost always true
   3- Often true
   2- Seldom true
   1- Never true
33. After working through a painful incident, I feel closer to this person.
   4- Almost always true
   3- Often true
   2- Seldom true
   1- Never true

34. Tensions remain long after we work through our hurts and disappointments with each other.
   4- Almost always true
   3- Often true
   2- Seldom true
   1- Never true

35. When I am hurt by this person, it would be safer not to confront them.
   4- Almost always true
   3- Often true
   2- Seldom true
   1- Never true

36. We believe that working through hurts and disappointments draws us closer together.
   4- Almost always true
   3- Often true
   2- Seldom true
   1- Never true

37. We apologize if we hurt each other.
   4- Almost always true
   3- Often true
   2- Seldom true
   1- Never true

38. I never forget a wrong done to me by this person.
   4- Almost always true
   3- Often true
   2- Seldom true
   1- Never true

39. I trust this individual to forgive me when I apologize.
   4- Almost always true
   3- Often true
   2- Seldom true
   1- Never true
**Demographics:** Please answer the following questions about yourself and your referent sibling.

40. What is your age? ____________

41. What you’re your referent sibling’s age? ____________

42. What is your sex? (circle one)
   Male
   Female

43. What is your referent sibling’s sex? (circle one)
   Male
   Female

44. What is your marital status? (circle one)
   Married
   Divorced
   Widowed
   Separated
   Never been married
   A member of an unmarried couple

45. What is your referent sibling’s married status? (circle one)
   Married
   Divorced
   Widowed
   Separated
   Never been married
   A member of an unmarried couple

46. How do you describe yourself? (Please circle the one option that best describes you)
   American Indian or Alaska Native
   Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   Asian or Asian American
   Black or African American
   Hispanic or Latino
   Non-Hispanic White
   Other ______________
47. What is your yearly household income? (circle one)
   Under 25,000
   $25,000-$39,999
   $40,000-$49,000
   $50,000-$64,000
   $75,000-$99,999
   More than $100,000

48. Is your referent sibling that you used throughout this study still alive?
   Yes
   No

49. How often do you have contact with the referent sibling used throughout this study? (choose the time frame that is the closest)
   Daily
   1 time a week
   1 time a month
   1 time a year
   Never

50. How did you find/hear about this survey?
    Facebook
    University listserv
    Friend
    Unsure
    Other

51. How many times did you participate in this survey? This will not affect your ability to be entered into a drawing for compensation.
    ______________________

*** Thank you for your participation in this research study ***
APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM FOR SURVEY RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

**Title of Study:** The Role of Relational Ethics and Forgiveness in Adult Sibling Relationships

**Introduction:** You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Sharon Apel Bursky investigating the relationship of adult sibling relationships.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this project is to examine forgiveness in adult sibling relationships and the role of relational ethics. We would like complete data from approximately 100 people.

**Procedures:** If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer a number of questions about your relationship with your adult sibling. This will take you about 20 minutes.

**Exclusion:** You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this research study and have an adult sibling who is at least 18 years old.

**Risks and Discomforts:** No adverse events are expected beyond those encountered in daily life and no specific liability plan is offered.

**Benefits:** You will receive no direct benefit from your participation in this study, but your participation may help us better understand relational ethics and forgiveness in adult sibling relationships.

**Payments to Participants:** You information will be entered in a drawing for the chance to win two $25 amazon gift cards.

**Right to refuse or withdraw:** Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You can quit at any time and you won’t lose anything, although if you do not complete the study, you will not be entered for the amazon gift card drawing.

**Confidential Data Collection:** At the end of the study, you will be asked to provide your name for the sole purpose of the gift card drawing Your name will not be associated with the questionnaires you complete. All data will be kept confidential and only the researchers will have access to the data. Participants will not be individually
identified in any publication or presentation of the research results. Only aggregate data will be used.

**Confidentiality of records:** Your answers will be put in a computer file by number, without your name. The raw data will be kept for no less than 5 years and destroyed after that time in accordance with APA guidelines.

**Who to contact with questions:** If you have any questions about this study, you may call Sharon Apel Bursky at (216) 253-4235 or via email at Sharon2183@gmail.com. This project has been reviewed and approved by The University of Akron Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the IRB at (330) 972-7666.

**Acceptance:** I have read the information provided and all of my questions have been answered. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. Checking “Yes” below will serve as my consent. I may request a copy of this consent statement for future reference.

___ Yes (I agree to participate in this study, and I am at least 18 years old)

___ No (I do not agree to participate in this study)
APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL

Office of Research Administration
Albion, OH 44005-2102
T: 330-972-7666
F: 330-972-4802
e: orr@ohio.edu
u.osu.edu/research/era

NOTICE OF APPROVAL

Date: February 18, 2016
To: Sharon Apel Burksy,
School of Counseling
From: Sharon McWhorter, IRB Administrator
IRB Number: 20160203
Title: Relational Ethics and Forgiveness in Adult Sibling Relationships

Approval Date: February 17, 2016

Thank you for submitting your IRB Application for review. Your protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and matches the following federal category for exemption:

☐ Exemption 1 – Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices.
☐ Exemption 2 – Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, or observation of public behavior.
☐ Exemption 3 – Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior not exempt under category 2, but subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office.
☐ Exemption 4 – Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens.
☐ Exemption 5 – Research and demonstration projects conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine public programs or benefits.
☐ Exemption 6 – Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies.

Annual continuation applications are not required for exempt projects. If you make changes to the study’s design or procedures that increase the risk to subjects or include activities that do not fall within the approved exemption category, please contact the IRB to discuss whether or not a new application must be submitted. Any such changes or modifications must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

Please retain this letter for your files. This office will hold your exemption application for a period of three years from the approval date. If you wish to continue this protocol beyond this period, you will need to submit another Exemption Request. If the research is being conducted for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, the student must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.

☑ Approved consent form/s enclosed

OHIO’s POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY
Uniting the Arts & Humanities with Science & Technology
The University of Akron's Polytechnical Initiative/earthtech/technology

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Consent Form for Survey Research Participation

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Confidential Data Collection: At the end of the study, you will directed to a separate site where you will be asked to provide your name for the sole purpose of the gift card drawing, if you elect to. Your name will not be associated with the questionnaires you complete. All data will be kept confidential and only the researchers will have access to the data. Participants will not be individually identified in any publication or presentation of the research results. Only aggregate data will be used.

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